

NEW EAGLE SERIES No. 1034

CAUGHT IN THE SNARE

by MAY AGNES FLEMING



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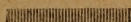
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CAUGHT IN THE SNARE

SEQUEL TO

"EDITH PERCIVAL"

(NEW EAGLE SERIES No. 1035)

BY

MAY AGNES FLEMING

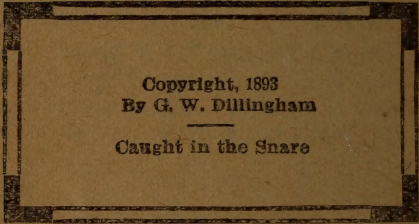
Author of "A Mad Marriage," "A Woman Without Mercy,"
"Silent and True," "A Treasure Lost," "Kate Danton,"
"Proud as a Queen," and numerous other books
published in the NEW EAGLE SERIES.



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Caught in the Snare

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SYNOPSIS OF "EDITH PERCIVAL."

When the War of Independence broke out in America, Frederic Stanley left England at the command of his father to join the army of the Royalists, in which the elder man held an important position. His son, however, had different views and had decided to cast his lot with the "rebels." The ship on which he sailed from England was wrecked, and all on board were lost with the exception of the captain, young Stanley, and his friend, Gus Elliott. They clung to a raft until they were picked up by an American privateer. Some days later a vessel was sighted on fire, and a volunteer crew, headed by Stanley, went to the rescue of those on board, among whom they found a young girl, Edith Percival, Gus Elliott's cousin. All were taken off safely, and when they arrived at Boston, Edith begged Stanley to go with her to her home and receive the thanks of her parents for having saved her life. He was cordially greeted by the whole family, including Edith's younger sister, Nell. While here, he learned, much to his sorrow, that Edith was engaged to Ralph de Lisle, also a Royalist, for by this time Stanley was very deeply in love with her. When he told his father that he would not fight against his countrymen, Sir William became violently angry, and ordered him from his home, telling him that if he were caught with the rebels, he himself would have him shot. Later Frederic was taken prisoner and his father carried out his threat and ordered him to be shot as a spy, but released him at the request of a mysterious person known as the Hermit of the Cliffs. Edith told her fiancé that she did not love him, and begged him to release her from her engagement, but he refused, knowing that she was in love with Stanley. Major Percival, being a Royalist, also refused to allow his daughter to change her mind, having heard that Stanley was on the side of the rebels, but postponed her marriage with De Lisle, who, infuriated at the delay, abducted her and kept her prisoner in a lonely house in the care of an old woman and Elva Snowe, a young girl from the neighboring village. He was about to have the marriage performed here when Stanley, with some companions, interrupted the ceremony, and a skirmish followed in which several of the combatants were killed, Stanley and Gus Elliott being overcome and taken prisoner by De Lisle's men.

CAUGHT IN THE SNARE.

CHAPTER I.

JOE SMITH.

“Dost deem that aught can hide in beggar rags.

A heart so bold as mine?

And dream'st thou aught of common danger now

Can scare me from my purpose?”

—BARRY CORNWALL.

To explain how the friends of Edith discovered her prison, it is necessary to retrace our steps a little.

For an hour or two after her departure with De Lisle, Major Percival walked thoughtfully up and down the broad piazza, debating within himself whether it were better to wait or compel Edith to fulfill her engagement. The words of Fred Stanley had thrown a new light on the subject, and he felt convinced that her affection for him was the cause of her refusal. To marry or not to marry, therefore, was the question; and in a state of unusual indecision the major debated the case *pro* and *con*.

While thus engaged, Nell came running up the stairs, and stood beside him:

“Papa, where's Edith?”

"Out riding with De Lisle."

"With De Lisle?" and Nell's eyes opened to their widest extent with amazement.

"Eh? What's that?" said the major, turning round sharply.

"Nothing, sir," said Nelly demurely, "but I really thought Ralph de Lisle was the last person Edith would go anywhere with."

"And why not, Miss Impertinence? Whom should she go with, if not with her future husband?"

"Why, papa, I thought Edith refused to fulfill her engagement?"

"We'll make her fulfill it," was the short, sharp, and decisive reply.

"Hem-m-m! Perhaps so," said Nell, with a scarcely perceptible smile, "but if I were in her shoes, I know I would not have gone with De Lisle to-night."

"You wouldn't?" And a storm began to gather in the major's eyes. "Why, may I ask?"

"Oh, I don't know; I wouldn't satisfy him so far; besides, he might try to run away with me or something. I wouldn't trust him."

The words were spoken thoughtlessly; but the major gave a sudden start, and stood silent. Nell left him, and tripped downstairs to join Gus in the garden, leaving him to his own reflections.

An hour passed away; Nell and Gus left the

garden and piazza for the cool, pleasant parlor; but the major still remained watching for the arrival of Edith and De Lisle. Another hour passed on, and still they came not. The major began to feel anxious and angry at the prolonged absence. His anxiety communicated itself to the other members of the family, as another hour wore away without them. A thousand conjectures were formed as to the cause of this unaccountable absence, but none seemed satisfactory. As midnight approached, uneasiness changed into real alarm; and the major and Gus, unable to endure the suspense longer, mounted their horses, and rode off in the direction they had taken.

A sleepless night was passed in Percival Hall. Early in the morning, both returned from their fruitless search, weary and dispirited. No clew could be discovered; and all gazed into one another's faces, pale with terror.

Half an hour after their return, a servant entered, bearing a note which he said had been given him by a man who immediately departed. The major glanced at the superscription, and recognized the bold, free hand of De Lisle. Tearing it open, he read:

"MY DEAR SIR: As for reasons, doubtless, you decline bestowing on me the hand of your

fair daughter, I am under the painful necessity of making her my wife without troubling you to give her away. For your own sake, I feel convinced you will not make a public affair of this, as I judged you have too much pride to allow your daughter's good name to become a byword for the town. Rest assured she shall be treated with all the respect due the daughter of so distinguished a gentleman as Major Percival; and when once my wife, shall be restored to her home on one condition. It is, that you will give me her fortune as a sort of ransom, which, as you are wealthy, no doubt you will willingly do. If you refuse, why then it will be all the worse for your pretty, but rather stubborn daughter. The retreat to which I have taken her is secure, and you cannot discover it; therefore, you had better make up your mind to comply with my terms at once. If you do, your daughter shall be immediately restored to you; if not——

"I have the honor, my dear sir, to remain,

"Yourse sincerely, RALPH DE LISLE."

"The scoundrel! The treacherous, deceitful villain!" thundered the major, springing to his feet, white with passion.

"What is it?" demanded Gus and Nell, while Mrs. Percival's eyes asked the same question, though her lips were silent.

"Read that!" exclaimed the major, as he flung the missive he had crumpled in his hand, fiercely from him. "Read that! For I cannot tell you!"

Nell took it up and read it slowly from beginning to end.

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival, "what shall we do?"

"Do?" shouted the major. "I'll send a bullet through his heart if ever my eyes light on him again. The black-hearted villain! Is this his return for all I have done for him? My daughter! My daughter in the power of such a villain!"

"My dear sir, what is the matter?" exclaimed a well-known voice; and looking up, they beheld Nugent, dusty and travel worn, standing before them.

In a few words Nell related all that had happened, for the rest were too much excited to do so, and ended by placing De Lisle's letter in his hand. The brow of Nugent grew dark, and his eyes flashed fiercely, but subduing all other signs of anger, he turned to his father, and said:

"Well, sir, on what plan have you decided?"

"Plan? I can think of nothing but of pursuing that scoundrel to the ends of the earth. Mount, mount, and after him!"

"Stay!" cried a voice that made them all start, it was so stern and commanding. "Are you mad to start on such a wild-goose chase? Wait; follow my directions, and all will be well!"

They looked up, and, to their amazement, the

Hermit of the Cliffs stood before them like some prophet of old, in his flowing robes, majestic bearing, and snowy hair.

"*You* here!" exclaimed Nugent in surprise.

"And wherefore not, my son?"

"I thought you were in the city. You were there a short time ago," said Nugent.

"Whithersoever my duty leads me, there am I," answered the hermit in his calm, grave voice.

"The wolf hath stolen a lamb from the flock, and the rest shall be left in the desert while we search for the one that is lost. Listen to me, and go not forth rashly."

"This is no time for fooling!" exclaimed the major impatiently. "Stand aside, old man, and let us begone!"

"Nay, there is one come who will show you the way," said the hermit. "Why should you wander in the dark when there is light at hand?"

"Do *you* know where my daughter is?" demanded Major Percival, fixing his eyes sternly upon him.

"One is at hand who does," repeated the hermit, in the same quiet tone. "My hand may not point out the way, but trust in him who will follow me. His eyes have been opened, and to him it is given to rescue the maiden of the house of Percival."

"Pshaw! Why do we stay, listening to such

nonsense?" demanded the major impetuously. "What can this hoary old man know of Edith? Let us away; why should we waste time lingering here?"

He turned to go, but the hand of the hermit was laid on his shoulder.

"You shall remain, Major Percival!" he said, in the same firm, calm tone of command. "It is given me to know that if you now set out, you will prove unsuccessful. Remain; he who cometh after me is at hand, and when he arrives, with your son and this youth, let him search for the lost daughter of your house; but do you remain here and watch over those who are left."

He bowed slowly and with grave dignity, and folding his garment around him, quitted the house.

All stood in amazement and uncertainty. Surprise, that he should know already what had occurred, and wonder at the probable meaning of his words, were mingled with an uncertainty whether to follow his advice or not. The major and Nugent thought of the strange power he exercised over Sir William Stanley, and in spite of their impatience were half inclined to follow his advice. Ere they could fully determine what course to pursue, however, Fred Stanley, his fine face flushed, and his garments disordered, stood before them.

"Stanley, by all that's wonderful!" exclaimed Nugent, in unbounded astonishment.

The major's brow grew dark as night; but the young man, in his excitement, scarcely seemed to notice him.

"What has happened? Where is Edith?" was his first demand.

"Young man, will you be good enough to tell us what sent you here?" said the major sternly, stepping forward.

"Certainly, sir!" said Fred, with a stiff bow; "this singular note." And he drew forth a letter, and handed it to the major, who opened it and read:

"Ride, ride for your life to Percival Hall. She whom you love is in the power of your rival. He has carried her off by force. Take the road to the north, near the village of R. are the nine woods, where an old mansion of De Lisle's is situated. There you will find Edith Percival.

"E. S., Hermit of the Cliffs."

"Let us start instantly!" exclaimed the major. "Every moment is precious."

"You had better follow the directions of the hermit, and remain here," said Nugent. "We three, with one or two friends, will be enough. De Lisle's men are in all probability far enough from their leader, who feels too secure in his retreat to dread a visit from us. Besides, I have

a message for you from your friend, Colonel Greyson, which admits of no delay, and will absolutely prevent your going with us."

The major seemed still uncertain; but the others joined Nugent in urging him to obey the hermit and remain behind.

Having at length reluctantly consented, Fred, Gus, and young Percival, with one or two friends, started in the direction pointed out by the hermit.

Having reached the place indicated, they secreted themselves in the woods, while Nugent, who was familiar with the place, went to reconnoiter.

He soon returned with the ominous intelligence that there was a force six times their number in the old house, and that it would ruin their cause altogether to attempt at present to contend against such odds. Nothing remained, therefore, but to lie in wait, and seize the first favorable opportunity. None, however, presented itself; and the afternoon of the following day, accidentally overhearing a conversation between two of De Lisle's men, by which they learned the marriage was to take place that very day, they determined at all risks to make the attempt, the result of which is already known to the reader.

Half an hour after his interview with Edith, De Lisle sat in his own room, eating a hasty breakfast ere he departed on his journey. His

meditations were at length abruptly interrupted by the entrance of Nan Crow, who, in her usual screeching tones, announced that a boy without wished to see him.

"What does he want?" said De Lisle.

"Want?" repeated Miss Crow, "yes, he wants to see you."

"What is his business?" demanded De Lisle, raising his voice.

"None of my business!" exclaimed Miss Crow in rising wrath; "allers the way every one treats me arter a trottin' me off my legs with the rhu-matiz in the small of my back, a bringing of pesky young gals to 'tend on, what ain't no business here, a fighten and sitten up killing of one another, with the rhumatiz in the small of my back——"

"Go to the deuce, you old fool!" angrily interrupted De Lisle, "be off with you and bring him here, whoever he is!"

Muttering to herself, Nan Crow quitted the room, and presently reappeared with a youth of some sixteen years, a rough, uncouth-looking lad.

He was small for his age, and dressed in a suit of coarse gray homespun, which looked, to use a common but expressive phrase, as though they had been thrown on by a pitchfork. His face was bronzed and darkened by exposure to the sun, his eyes were bright and intelligent, and

shone and glittered like glass beads through the coarse masses of uncombed sandy hair. His walk was peculiar, as he shuffled along in a pair of huge cowhide boots, dragging his legs after him as though they belonged to somebody else.

Such was the lad who now stood, hat in hand, before De Lisle, shifting uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Who are you?" demanded De Lisle, gazing rather contemptuously at the newcomer.

"Joe Smith, sir," answered the boy, with a strong nasal twang of "deown East."

"What do you want?"

"Waal, I kinder kalkerlated on gettin' work."

"Work? What kind of work?" said De Lisle.

"Waal, I ain't particular; most anything comes handy to me."

"What have you been accustomed to?"

"Little of everything, boss. I gen'ly worked on the farm to hum."

"Why did you leave 'hum' as you call it?"

"Waal, me and mother and Glory Ann thought as how I'd better come to Bosting and 'list; but arter lookin' round a spell, I didn't like it, and kincluded 'twasn't no sich fun to be shot at as 'twas cracked up to be."

"What induced you to come here?"

"Why, I'd hearn tell o' you some, and thought maybe you wouldn't mind hirin' a new hand to

cook vittils, and bring water, and chop wood, and sich. You see, boss, I'm rather a smart chap, 'specially arter a lickin'; and didn't see no reason why I'd waste my talents a-raising punkins all my life; so when I makes my fortin here, I intends goin' home, and gettin' spliced onto Glory Ann Lazybones, a gal what's a reg'lar buster and no mistake."

"You *are* an original," said De Lisle, rather amused, "but I am surprised that you do not wish to join the rebels, like so many others of your class."

"Waal, boss, I allers had high ideers since I was 'bout so old, when I used to ride roun' every day on mother's old clotheshorse for exercise. These here rebels ain't no 'count, and bein' the weaker party, I intends pitchin' into 'em like a thousand o' bricks. Mother allers sez—sez she: 'Joe,' sez she, 'you stick to the strongest party, my son, it's allers best,' so, in course, as I'm a dootiful son, I obeys the old 'oman. 'Sides, if I turn Britisher, and help to lick our boys there's no tellin' but what they'll want to make a lord or an earl o' me one o' these days. Lord Joe Smith! Jee-whittica! that sounds sort o' grand, don't it?"

"I see, number one's your lookout!" said De Lisle. "Well, since your ambition soars so high, it would be a pity to deprive Glory Ann of the

chance to become Lady Smith; so I don't mind taking you into my service."

"Thankee, boss; you're a brick!" interrupted Mr. Smith, patronizingly.

"Don't be so familiar, sir," said De Lisle, sharply. "Learn a little more respect when addressing your betters. For the present, your duty will consist in assisting my housekeeper in her household affairs, and in looking after and attending to the wants of two or three prisoners confined here. One of my men will direct you what to do. And now, to begin your new duties, go and saddle my horse, and bring him round to the door."

"All right, siree!" replied Joe, clapping his hat on his head, and giving it a vigorous thump down over his eyes, as he hastened out to obey the order, leaving De Lisle to finish his breakfast.

"There is yet one more duty to perform," muttered De Lisle; "one so agreeable that it amply compensates for all the humiliation I have been, through him, forced to endure. Master Fred Stanley, I go to pay you a morning visit, and see how you estimate my kind hospitality in keeping you here my guest."

The sinister smile he wore made his face almost repulsive, as he arose and left the room.

Passing through a long hall, he descended a flight of narrow winding stairs, and stood in an-

other long hall, flanked on each side by doors. A sentry stood pacing to and fro before them. He paused and touched his hat respectfully on seeing De Lisle.

"Where is Stanley confined?" he inquired.

"Here, sir," answered the man, opening one of the doors to allow him to enter.

De Lisle passed in, and found himself in a gloomy room, with a damp, unwholesome odor. Seated on a low stool, the only article of furniture it contained, was Fred Stanley, his forehead leaning on his hand, his eyes fixed on the floor, his brow knit, as though in deep, troubled thought. As the creaking of the heavy door fell on his ear, he looked up quickly, and sprang to his feet as he saw his mortal foe before him.

For a moment they stood silently facing each other—those two rivals. De Lisle's face wore a look of triumph, mingled with most intense and deadly hatred. A bitter, sneering smile was on his lip, and a look of gratified malice in his eyes. Fred, stern and cold and haughty, stood opposite him, his arms folded across his breast, returning his gaze with such a look of lofty scorn, that, in spite of himself, De Lisle quailed before him.

"Well, Frederic Stanley, my hour of triumph has come," said De Lisle, with a look of malignant hate.

"Villain, do your worst, I defy you!" was the bold answer.

"That most assuredly I shall do," returned De Lisle. "Before the sun's rise and set, you shall die the ignominious death of the halter."

"Do your worst, Ralph de Lisle; I fear you not!" was the rejoinder.

"When you crossed my path, and won the affections of her whom I loved, I swore a deadly oath of vengeance. Fortune has favored me, the time has come, and your hours are numbered. She whom you love is in my power, and the same hour which will see you swinging a discolored corpse between heaven and earth will see her a bride in my arms. You both began a dangerous game, Fred Stanley, when you thwarted my wishes, as you will find when the halter is around your neck, and as she will discover when, after making her mine, I will whisper in her ear the fate of him whom she loves better than life."

"Fiend! Devil in human form! Do your worst, and may the heaviest curse of Heaven fall upon you!" exclaimed Fred, growing livid with passion.

"Ha! I thought you would feel that!" said De Lisle, with a grim smile. "You will have ample time to meditate on these and many other consoling truths between this and the day of doom. It will also, doubtless, be a pleasure to

you to know that Edith will be a prisoner under the same roof with you until my return, which may be to-morrow, or at the furthest, three days hence. And now it occurs to me that my revenge will be greater to allow you to be present at our bridal. I will thus have a double triumph over you both."

"A fiend could not be more diabolical!" exclaimed Fred, paling involuntarily at his words.

"Have I not well learned the art of torturing?" went on De Lisle, with a fiendish smile. "Death itself would be nothing, that would be a poor triumph. I know you well enough to be aware that you do not fear death; but the torture I shall inflict before death will last even after the soul has left the body. I will leave you now to repose and solitude. You will have ample time," he added, with a sneer, "to meditate on your latter end, and make your peace with Heaven during my absence. Should I return to-morrow, before another sun sets you shall swing as high as Haman. Au revoir."

And turning on his heel, he strode from the room.

"To-morrow?" repeated Fred, gazing after his retreating figure, "who knows what to-morrow may bring forth?"

CHAPTER II.

JOE VISITS HIS PRISONERS.

"Trust in God!

Thou forlorn one, cease thy moan;

All thy pain and all thy sorrow,

Are to God, the Highest known;

He leaves thee now, but helps to-morrow.

Trust in God!"

The bright sunshine of the morning following that eventful night shone into Edith's room; but it was all unheeded by her. She lay on her face on the bed, not sleeping, but in a deep, heavy torpor, her white arms extended above her head, so still and motionless that but for the quick breathing one might imagine her dead.

Not of herself was she thinking, but of those for whom she would have given her life, of *one* whom she would gladly have died to save. Fred! Fred! All through that miserable night his name had been on her lips, his image alone in her heart. Never again would she meet those dear, dark eyes, already, perhaps, closed forever; that brave heart, whose every throb had been for her, might now be cold and still in death. All that had ever made life desirable seemed lost to her forever, and in the glad sunshine of that bright morning she lay and prayed for death.

The bolt was withdrawn, the door opened, some one entered, but she did not look up. She was conscious that some one was bending over her, but still she did not move until she heard a strange voice muttering in a sort of soliloquy:

“Crickey! She beats the seven sleepers, she does. I’m blamed if she ain’t as sound as a top. Waal, I s’pose I’d better leave the vittals here, and arter her snooze she’ll fall to.”

With a start, Edith rose on her elbow, and gazed around. Her amazement at beholding the uncouth figure and face of honest Joe Smith may be imagined. So completely was she bewildered that she continued to stare at him between surprise and terror, scarcely knowing whether to cry out for help or not. Joe, however, bore her scrutiny with wonderful composure, and returned her stare with compound interest.

“Good mornin’, marm, fine day this; how’s your folks? I hope the old woman and all the folks to hum is well,” said Joe in a tone of condescending politeness.

“What?” said Edith, rather bewildered by the rapidity with which this speech was delivered.

“Never mind, ’tain’t worth sayin’ over again,” said Joe. “I hope I didn’t disturb any pleasant dreams o’ yourn. You was sleepin’ away like all creation when I came in.”

“Who sent you here?” inquired Edith, whose terror had not quite vanished.

“Waal, the cap’n did, marm,” replied Joe; “I ’xpect I’m to be waitin’ maid till he comes back. I hain’t no objections to it, though, ’cause, maybe, I’ll be able to larn Glory Ann somethin’ in her line arter I go back to hum. Here’s your breakfas’, marm, what that jolly old case down in the kitchen sent me with. Seems to me the cap’n’s got a taste for keepin’ people in the lockup, judgin’ by all I’ve ’tended to this mornin’. Let’s see two and one’s three and one’s four—four I’ve visited this mornin’, countin’ you.”

An exclamation of delight broke involuntarily from the lips of Edith. Three besides her! Then Fred was living still.

“Hey? What is it? Did you stick a pin in you?” inquired Joe, mistaking the cause of her emotion.

“Who were the three you visited this mornin’?” she inquired, with breathless interest.

“Waal, let’s see,” said Joe, closing one eye and laying his forefinger meditatively on the point of his nose, “the first, I think, somebody called Goose, or somethin’ about the size o’ that.”

“Gus,” amended Edith eagerly.

“Yaas, Gus, or Goose, or some sort o’ a fowl. I found him lyin’ on the floor, takin’ a snooze, I s’pose, somethin’ like I found you. He got up

when I came in, and fell to the vittals as if he'd been livin' on pavin' stones for a week, an' 'tween every mouthful he took to askin' me a string o' questions long as a lawyer's conscience. He wanted to know all the particulars 'bout you, and 'fore he'd give me time to answer one of 'em, he blowed the cap'n and the whole blamed consarn sky high. 'Twa'n't no use to try to reason matters with him, 'cause when I took to arguin', 'fore I got to thirdly, he told me to go and be hanged. You see I couldn't stand that, I wasn't used to it, mother never 'lowed no profane swearin' to hum, so I just told him to be hanged himself, if he liked, but as for me, I was like the Highlandman, in no hurry."

"What Highlandman?" inquired Edith absently.

"Why, some old Scotch big bug, long ago, had a servant that did somethin', I forgot what, and he was goin' to hang him for it. But, you see, the servant had been a favorite of his, so his master told him he'd grant him the favor of choosing whichever tree in his orchard he'd like to be hung on. The servant was tickled to death to hear it an' went out to choose the tree with his master. At last, he stopped before a gooseberry bush, and said he'd be hung onto that.

"'Go to grass!' sez his master; 'that ain't big enough to hang a six-footer like you on!'

“‘Oh, well,’ sez the servant, ‘I’ll wait till it grows big. I’m in no hurry!’ ”

“But the others—the others?” exclaimed Edith, who had listened impatiently to this digression.

“Oh, ya-as, just so. Well, the next was the very pictor o’ you, s’pect he must be some relation. He was sittin’ down onto a bench, an’ asked me a few questions, not many, though, ’bout a dozen or so—if I’d seen you, and where was the boss, and so on. It was sort o’ comfortable to talk to him ’sides the other two, who didn’t seem to have a single grain o’ senses in their knowledge boxes.”

“And the third?” demanded Edith hurriedly.

“Him? Oh, Jerusalem! I’ve seen a wildcat, I’ve seen a bear with a sore head, I’ve seen a gander when somebody carried off the goslin’s before him, I’ve see mother in a passion, and a-flarin’ around at the governor, but I never, never, never saw such a savage, wild-lookin’ stunner as t’other one. Cracky! When I went in thar, he was a-tearin’ up and down as though he was boun’ to have a walk somehow if the floor held out, lookin’ so sort o’ sayage lookin’ an’ fierce, that I like to spilt his breakfas’ a top of him. It’s lucky I didn’t; for if he’d got his dander riz any wuss, I don’t know whar Joe Smith’d be

now. I'm blamed if I ever seen any one in sich a tearin' rage as that cove was in."

"It must have been Fred," thought Edith. "Was he wounded, how did he look?" she asked aloud.

"Waal, marm, I don't know as I kin tell," said Joe thoughtfully. "He set me into sich a flusterification, that it was most a danger to look at him. He had a black coat and trousis, and hair on, and was as tall as—as—I don't know who. He was sort o' darkish lookin', with a black murstuasher onto his upper lip. Some people might call him good lookin'; but Glory Ann allers sez fair hair's the nicest." And Joe gave his tow locks a complacent shake.

"Would you take a message from me to them?" inquired Edith eagerly.

"Waal, now, I don't know," said Joe rather reluctantly; "twould be sorter agin orders, you know. Sorry to refuse you, marm, but I can't help it."

"Tell him, at least, that I will die sooner than marry De Lisle. You will befriend me by doing so; and you can do no one any possible injury," said Edith pleadingly.

"Tell who, marm—which of 'em?"

"The one you spoke of last."

"Oh! the fierce-lookin' one. Yes'm, I don't mind tellin' him. But I guess he won't care. I

don't believe he'd go to the weddin' if he was asked."

"You will tell him, at least? You will not forget it?" said Edith anxiously.

"Oh, no fear; I'll tell him if he does blow me up. 'Tany rate, I guess weddin's is the last thing he'll think about, 'cause the boss is boun' to string him up like a dried mackerel soon as ever he comes back."

A convulsive shudder was Edith's only answer.

"Waal, now, marm, I wouldn't take on so if I was you," said Joe, gazing sympathetically toward Edith. "Arter all, I shouldn't wonder if things should turn out all right in the end. P'rhaps you've hearn tell o' people entertainin' angels in disguise?"

Edith lifted her head, and looked at him with so much surprise, that Joe laughed and said:

"Keep up heart—there's nothing like it. I shouldn't be s'prised if me and Glory Ann danced at your weddin' yet. There's never no use in frettin'. Hope on, hope ever!"

"Who are you?" asked Edith, with an undefined feeling that she had heard the voice before.

"Lor'! I'm only Joe Smith, from Bungtown. Old Jake Smith's my governor, an' me an' Glory Ann Lazybones is goin' to hitch teams one of these times, when they make a lord or somethin'

of me, that's all. 'Tain't wuth makin' a book of."

"I think you resemble some one I've seen before," said Edith, with a puzzled look; "but whom I cannot tell. Well, you may leave me now, I wish to be alone. You will not forget to deliver my message?"

"All right, marm; Joe Smith's got a stunnin' memory. Good morning. I 'spect that blessed old angel down in the kitchen'll give me fits for stayin' here so long. Don't forget to keep up your spirits. I don't believe we'll have a weddin' or a hangin' so soon as the boss thinks."

With this sage concluding remark, worthy Joe shuffled out of the room, leaving Edith to ruminate on the probable meaning of his words.

CHAPTER III.

PLOTTING.

'Nightly tears have dimmed the luster
Of thy sweet eyes, once so bright;
And as when dark willows cluster,
Weeping o'er marble rocks,
O'er thy forehead white,
Droop thy waving locks—
Yet thou art beautiful, poor girl,
As angels in distress—
Yea, comforting thy soul, dear girl,
With thy loveliness."—TUPPER.

The day's toil was over. Nan Crow, after screeching and grumbling and scolding to her heart's content, had thrown her apron over her head and fallen asleep in her easy-chair in the long kitchen. The men were loitering idly about, some lying on the grass, where the shadows fell long and dark, rejoicing in the cool evening breeze after the scorching heat of the day; some sat at the table playing cards, swearing and vociferating at an appalling rate; others lounged in groups round the room, with bottles and glasses before them, relating their several adventures for the general benefit of all.

Mr. Joe Smith, who found his duties of maid-of-all-work rather fatiguing, would gladly have left the revelers to themselves; but they, having

no one to wait on them, were determined he should not escape so easily.

Unceasing calls for Mrs. Smith, as they named him, resounded continually from one end of the room to the other, until at last, in a fit of desperation, he told them to go to grass and wait on themselves. A shout of laughter, and a unanimous cry of "Come back! Come back!" reached him, but unheeding their shouts, Joe resolutely made his escape, and set off for a ramble by himself.

Sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree, he leaned his head on his hand, and fell into a fit of profound musing. For upwards of an hour he remained thus, with brows knit, eyes fixed on the ground, and lips compressed like one in deep meditation. Suddenly a new light seemed to dawn on him, and he sprang to his feet with the triumphant exclamation:

"I have it!"

"Have what?" said a merry voice beside him, and turning abruptly round, worthy Joe beheld our little friend Elva.

"Waal, now, I don't know as it's any business o' yourn," said he, surveying her coolly from head to foot.

"You're mighty polite," she said.

"Waal, yaas, rayther; Glory Ann allers said so," said Joe modestly.

"Who's Glory Ann?"

"A young lady up to hum; I'm goin' to be married to her some day."

"Nice girl I expect?"

"Nice! That word doesn't begin to tell about Glory Ann Lazybones. I tell you she's a reg'lar screamer, and no mistake."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Elva. "Is she as good-looking as I am?"

"Waal, now, I don't know. Some folks might say you was better lookin'; but I don't. You ain't so showy, you know. Glory Ann's got nice red hair; and red-haired girls is allers smart and spunky."

"They are, eh? Now, if I'd known that before, I'd have dyed, and not gone whimpering through the world, afraid to call my soul my own. Perhaps it's not too late yet, eh? What do you think?"

"Oh, you don't need it. You've got impudence enough. You'll do."

"Oh, really, that's cool. What's your name?"

"What's yours?"

"Elvena Snowe—not so pretty as Glory Ann Lazybones, is it?"

"Not quite; hers is a Scriptor name, you know. Yours is pooty, though, and sounds sort o' cool this hot weather."

"Now, what's yours?"

"Waal, it might be Beelzebub, or Nebuchadnezzar, or any other Bible name, but 'tain't. I reckon I won't tell you; I'd rather not have it made public."

"Why?"

"Oh, well, Joe Smith ain't a common name, so I guess I'll keep it a secret. 'Sides, there's no tellin' but you may fall in love with me; and I'm anxious to avoid sich a c'lamity."

"You're a case! Aren't you the boy De Lisle hired yesterday?"

"Waal, I mought be, and agin I moughtn't. Seems to me you're very inquisitive," said Joe suspiciously.

"And it seems to *me* you're very cautious. What do you take me for?" said Elva indignantly.

"Why, you might be a good many things, you might be Cornwallis or Washington in disguise, or you might be a spy from the enemy. There's never no tellin'."

"You're too smart to live long, Joe, dear. How do you suppose a little thing like me could be anybody but herself?"

"It does seem odd," said Joe, scratching his head, as if to extract some reason by the roots: "but then you know, it's better to be sure than sorry. I like to be on my guard, so's I won't leave Glory Ann a widder."

"I honor you for your prudence, my son. And now, Joe, when I assure you I'm no desperate character—neither Cornwallis nor Washington in petticoats—maybe you'll answer me a few questions?"

"Yaas'm, if they're no ways improper for me to listen to."

"You sweet innocent! Do you think I'd ask such a saintly cherub as you anything improper? First, then, there's a young lady confined prisoner in that old house over there."

"Waal, now, I raally couldn't say." And Joe looked innocently unconscious as he issued this little work of fiction.

"Oh, get out, and don't tell fibs!" exclaimed Elva, indignantly. "There's three other prisoners there, too, isn't there?"

"There might be; I don't like to say for sartin, for fear o' tellin' a lie," replied Joe, shutting one eye, and fixing the other reflectively on a grasshopper at his feet. "I'll ask when I go back, and send you a letter to let you know."

"You abominable wretch! I know very well they're there," said Elva, losing all patience.

"Well, and if you know very well, where the mischief's the use o' askin' me a string of impudent questions, and callin' me names?" exclaimed Joe indignantly.

Elva couldn't resist laughing at Joe's look of offended dignity.

"Yes, you may larf," he said with a look of intense disgust. "I s'pose it's all very funny comin' and callin' a fellar names. It shows all the brought'n up you had!" And Joe gave the innocent grasshopper at his feet a vicious kick.

"There, now, Joe, don't get mad, like a good boy," said Elva, patting him soothingly on the back; "listen to me: I'm Miss Percival's friend and wish to see her."

"Well, go and see her then," said Joe sulkily, "I ain't hinderin' you."

"But I can't," said Elva, "unless you help me."

"Me!" said Joe, opening wide his eyes, "how?"

"Why, you must find the key of the side door, and let me in that way. I don't want anybody to see me. Now, do, like a dear, good boy."

"You be grannied!" exclaimed Mr. Smith losing all patience. "Can't you tell a fellar who you want to see, and not be goin' on with your story hindend foremost."

"Why, I thought you knew," said Elva. "I mean the prisoner, Miss Percival."

"Oh! that's her name, is it? How was I to know, when nobody never told me? So you want to see her, do you?"

"Yes, yes, yes! Do let me in, will you?"

"Why don't you go and ask some of the others?"

"Oh! they won't let me, they're hateful, but you're not. Ah, Joe, won't you?" And Elva looked pleadingly up in his face.

"Waal, now marm," said Joe, laying one finger reflectively on his nose. "I'd like to oblige you if 'twas any ways possible, but if I'm found out, the boss wouldn't make no bones o' stringing me up like a red herrin', and I tell you what, I hain't no ambition to be elevated in the world after that fashion."

"He won't find you out; how can he?" exclaimed Elva impetuously; "he is away, the men are all lounging and drinking in the other wing of the building, old Nan Crow is asleep, and there is no one plotting mischief or making love but you and me. There! you needn't look so surprised. I know more about that old house and its inmates than you think. So, now, Joe, you dear, good-natured looking old soul, let me in to see Miss Percival, and I'll dance at your wedding."

This last entreaty had a due effect upon Joe, who indulged in sundry low chuckles at the idea. Recovering his composure at last, he seated himself deliberately on the log, and crossing one leg over the other, and fixing his eyes solemnly upon his cowhide boots, fell into a profound fit of mus-

ing. Elva stood watching him, swinging her light straw hat by the strings, and tapping her little foot impatiently up and down.

"Well, now, Joe, I hope you'll soon honor me with an answer," she said at last, quite out of patience. "I declare I never saw such a stick of a fellow as you are, a body can hardly get a word out of you."

"Eh?" said Joe, looking up; "were you speakin' to me, Miss Elva?"

"Was I speaking to you, Miss Elva?" repeated the young lady, mimicking his tone. "Yes, I was speaking to you, Miss Elva. Did you ever hear it was impolite not to answer a lady when she speaks to you?"

"Waal, if I don't talk much, I keeps up a mighty big thinking," said Joe, "and as to answerin' ladies, why, as I never met one yet, I couldn't hev' bin very imperlite to 'em."

"Why, you horrid, impudent fellow, what do you call me but a lady?"

"Oh, my eyes!" ejaculated Joe, with a look of infinite contempt. "You a lady. You hain't no more the look of one than I hev. Lady, indeed! You git out!"

"Well, we won't argue the question now," said Elva. "Perhaps we've hardly time at present to do the subject justice. And now, once for all, will you grant my request?"

"Why, I don't mind if I do, seein' it's *you*," replied Joe; "but first I'll go and see Miss Percival, and tell her you want to see her. By the time I git back it'll be dark, and you can git in without bein' seen, and everything will go off smoothly."

"That's a good boy," said Elva approvingly. "Maybe I won't write to Glory Ann one of these days, and tell her what a nice fellow she's going to get. Hurry up now, and I'll wait here till you come back."

So saying, she seated herself on the fallen tree, and watched honest Joe as he shuffled slowly out of sight and disappeared among the trees.

An hour passed, and he had not made his appearance. A deep gloom was settling around, the dark pines swayed solemnly to and fro in the night breeze. There was no light save that of the radiant stars; no sound save that of the wind and the cry of the katydid. The silence was almost painful, as Elva sat wild with impatience. At length, as she was about to despair of his coming at all, a familiar voice at her ear startled her with the expressive words:

"Here we is!"

"Oh, Joe, is it you? I thought you would never come. Well, can I see her?" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"Yes'm, I've 'ranged everything beautifully.

I'll go back to the house, and you steal round to the side door you was speaking of, and I'll let you in. That's the way."

And each took a different path, both leading to the old house.

The side door spoken of had long been unused, and was almost hidden by vines and shrubs. Forcing her way through these, Elva waited until she heard the key turn in the rusty lock. Pushing open the door, she entered a long, dark hall, where she beheld Joe standing, lamp in hand.

"Here take this," he said, handing her the light. "I s'pose you know the way up to the room better'n I can show you. I'll be about here and wait, and let you out."

"You're a darling!" exclaimed Elva, as she almost flew up a winding staircase. "How I wish I was Glory Ann Lazybones to get such a prize as you." And with a merry laugh she vanished amid the gloom, while Joe gazed after her with a look of decided admiration.

Reaching the well-known chamber of the prisoner, she tapped at the door. A low voice bade her enter, and withdrawing the bolts she passed into the room.

Edith sat by the table, her head leaning on her hand. She looked up as Elva entered, and approached with extended hands.

Elva was shocked beyond measure by the

change those few days had made. The face of Edith, always fair, seemed now perfectly transparent, the deep-blue eyes had grown dim and heavy with constant weeping. A long illness could hardly have changed her more than those miserable days and sleepless nights, albeit she was not used to "tears by night instead of slumber."

"My dear Elva, how glad I am to see you again!" she said, pressing the young girl's hands in her own.

"The pleasure is mutual, my dear Miss Percival. But how pale and thin you are looking. Have you been sick?"

"No, not exactly sick; but I have been sick in body and mind. Oh, Elva! how could I be otherwise in this dreadful place?"

"Very true," said Elva sadly, "and your friends, are they still here, or has De Lisle——"

"No, no," interrupted Edith hurriedly, "not yet. But when he returns—— Oh, Elva, Elva! pray Heaven I may die before that dreadful time."

"Not so, Miss Percival. You shall live and be happy in spite of all the De Lisles that ever cheated the hangman," exclaimed Elva. "We'll see if woman's wit is not more than a match for man's cunning. De Lisle will not return, father says, until the day after to-morrow; and when he does come back and finds his bird has flown

away from her cage during his absence, won't there be a scene? Whew! It will be as good as a play to see him." And Elva clapped her hands in delight.

"Elva! What do you mean? I do not understand," said Edith, looking bewildered.

"Why, you shall make your escape to-morrow night, that's the talk. When everybody is sleeping, I'll come here, fasten a rope ladder to your window—climb up—iron grating's old—easily taken off—you'll get down—make a moonlight flitting—and before morning dawns you'll be over the hills and far away!"

Edith caught her breath at the vision thus conjured up. But a moment's reflection banished the bright hopes Elva's words had recalled to her heart.

"My cousin, my brother, and—their friend, how can I go and leave them here in the power of De Lisle? Oh, Elva, I cannot go."

"Bother!" exclaimed Elva impatiently. "What good can your staying here do them? Will it help them any you marrying De Lisle, as you will most assuredly have to do, if you wait until he comes back? If they really care for you, will it not render them far more miserable than anything they may have themselves to suffer? Whereas, if you escape, you may yet rescue them; or if you cannot, you can at least let every

one know what a villain he is, and have the comfort of letting the world see him dance on nothing! Stay here, indeed! Nonsense, Miss Percival! I beg your pardon for saying so, but the idea is perfectly absurd."

Edith's mood always caught its tone and impetus from whoever chanced to be with her. Now some of the daring spirit that glowed on the cheeks and flashed in the eyes of Elva animated her own heart, as she raised her head and said firmly:

"Be it so then, kindest, best of friends. I shall make the attempt; if I succeed, I shall at least be spared the wretched doom of becoming the wife of one I detest; if I fail, my fate can be no worse than it is now."

"Fail!" echoed Elva cheerily. "In my vocabulary there is no such word as fail. No, you will live and laugh at De Lisle yet."

"That's the chat!" exclaimed a voice that made them both start; and turning round in alarm, they beheld the shock head of Master Joe protruded through the half-open door.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ESCAPE.

"The lovely stranger stands confessed
A maid in all her charms."—GOLDSMITH.

"That's the chat!" again repeated the worthy youth, as, seeing he was discovered, he walked in and coolly took a seat.

"Oh, Joe! my dear Joe! you will not betray us?" exclaimed Elva, while Edith sat in silent dismay.

"Don't know 'bout that," replied Joe. "'Tain't fair to be cheatin' the boss in this fashion. La! how nicely I caught you that time!" and evidently highly delighted at the recollection, he leaned back and laughed until the tears stood in his eyes.

"Joe, you won't tell, will you?" pleaded Elva. "How would you like now if Glory Ann was a prisoner and wanted to escape, and somebody hindered her? Just think what a heartrending case that would be, and let us off."

"Waal, now, I don't know's I'd care. I's gettin' sorter tired of Glory Ann," said Joe coolly.

"Unfaithful youth!" exclaimed Elva, in a voice of horror. "Poor, deserted Glory Ann. But since that fails to move you, Miss Percival's father is very rich, and if you help her to escape your fortune is made."

"Go to grass!" indignantly exclaimed Mr. Smith. "What d'ye s'pose I care 'bout his money? No'm; if you hain't somethin' better to propose than that, I'll blab!"

"What *can* I offer?" said poor Elva in despair. "Just mention something yourself Joe, and if it's in my power you shall have it."

"There's one thing," said Joe meditatively.

"Name it, name it!" exclaimed Elva impatiently.

"It's very easy, too, though I never thought of it afore," went on Joe, in the same slow, thoughtful tone.

"Name it, name it!" exclaimed the impatient Elva.

"Yes. I don't care 'bout Glory Ann, there's no mistake in that. Red hair's common, and I guess I'll take to some other color," continued Joe seriously, without lifting his eyes off the floor.

"Oh, you wretch? You provoking creature! You stupid old thing you! Will you tell me what it is?" and Elva, losing all patience, shook him so soundly that poor Joe looked up quite astonished.

"Hey? What's the matter? Oh, you want to know what it is, do you? Waal, ye see, I've got kinder tired o' Glory Ann, as I sed, and I'd like a change; so I'll help the young lady to run off, if——"

"Well, if what?" reiterated that young lady.

Joe paused and looked doubtfully at Elva.

"If you'll marry me!" exclaimed Joe, like a man of honor, coming to the point at once.

"Done!" exclaimed Elva; "there's my hand on it. Who'll say after this that I haven't had a proposal?"

And Elva cast a glance toward Edith that, in spite of herself, brought a smile to the face of the latter.

"You're a trump!" exultingly exclaimed Joe, "a regular stunner! I tell you what, I'll set free them three coves down in the lower regions if you like. I will, by gracious!"

With an exclamation of joy, Edith and Elva both sprang forward and caught each a hand of Joe, who looked a little surprised, not to say alarmed, at this sudden attack.

"Joe, dear, you're a darling!" exclaimed Elva, "I'll marry you a dozen times over if you like!"

"All right!" said Joe; "and now that the courtin' part o' the business is over, s'pose we change the subject. Let's see: to-morrow night, 'bout twelve, be ready, and if we don't fix 'em it'll be a caution!"

And he arose to leave.

"But, Joe, won't you tell us what you intend to do?" said Elva; "just consider I'm your better half now, and have a right to know."

"Don't trouble yourself, marm. I'll tell you afterward," replied Joe; "and now I shouldn't be s'prised if 'twas time for you to go. To-morrer night, 'bout this time, come round to the side door, and I'll let you in, so's to be ready to start with us."

Elva laughed, and with a cheerful good night turned to follow him, leaving Edith with a more hopeful look on her face than she had worn for a long time.

The following day Joe did not appear until nearly noon, when he informed Edith that he had told her friends of their plan, and that they were "tickled to death 'bout it." To all her anxious inquiries as to what that plan was, he only replied by telling her to "hold on and she'd see arter a spell."

With the approach of night came Elva, who was silently admitted by Joe through the side door, and conducted to Edith's apartment. There that worthy youth left them, after many charges not to be asleep when he called for them, by and by.

Elva knew that three men remained each night in the corridor before the cells of the prisoners, and how he was to conduct them past these was a mystery she could not solve. Joe, however, turned a deaf ear to all her questions, and re-

peating his command to be ready at the appointed hour, left them to themselves.

Passing through the many halls and passages and staircases, Joe at length reached the opposite end of the house, and entered a spacious sitting room, where nearly a dozen men were seated round a long table in the middle of the floor, singing, shouting, telling stories and vociferating in the most approved fashion. At the head of the table sat Paul Snowe, the father of Elva, in blissful ignorance of the plot his audacious little daughter was weaving to free his prisoners.

"Hi, there! Mrs. Smith! Where the deuce have you been all evening?" called a flashy looking individual, known as Dandy Dan; "I believe, in my soul, the tow-headed scoundrel is forever making love to Lady Beauty above stairs."

"Come here, Mrs. Smith, my dear," said another, "the jug's empty, and Nan Crow's asleep. Be off to the kitchen and fill it, and here's your good health, ma'am."

With a smothered growl, which elicited a shout of laughter, Joe took the huge earthen jar which stood in the center of the table, and set off on the errand. Filling it from a large cask which stood in the kitchen, he drew a bottle from his pocket containing a colorless liquid and emptied its contents into the Jamaica rum. A smile of triumph flitted over his face, which was, how-

ever, changed to one of sulky stupidity, as he again stood before the revellers, panting under his load.

"Good boy, Joe," said Dandy Dan, helping him to lift the jar on the table, "has your mother any more like you?"

"Yes, thar's lots on' em to hum, but none so smart as me," said Joe, in a tone of artless simplicity.

"You're a genius, Joe. Pity they didn't make a lawyer of you!"

"No, sir, none o' our family ever fell so low as that yet," said Joe, in a tone of offended pride; "mother was to law once and I never wants to know no more 'bout it."

"And what sent the old lady to law?" inquired Paul Snowe.

"Waal, 'twas 'bout our cow. Our cow and mother and two other cows was out, and she kicked the minister."

"Who did? Your mother?"

"No, the cow. He was goin' 'long, and she took to jawin' him 'bout somethin' she didn't like in his sermon."

"The cow did?"

"No, mother. So he comes over to 'xplain and he leaned agin' her and taks to smoothin' down her back."

"Smoothing your mother's back?"

"No, the cow's. But she wasn't goin' to take none o' his blarney, so she jist turned up her nose and told him to go to pot."

"The cow told him so?"

"No, mother! But he took to arguin' so at last forgetting he wasn't in the pulpit, he brought his fist down with an almighty thump on her back."

"On your mother's back?"

"No, darn ye, on the cow's! So havin' a spirit of her own that wouldn't put up with sich insults, she lifts up her hind leg and gave him a kick."

"Your mother did?"

"No, blame you, the cow! By gracious I won't stand to hear the old woman insulted this way!" exclaimed Joe indignantly.

A roar of laughter followed, during which Joe stood looking savagely from one to the other, and at last turned away in evident disgust.

"I say, Joe, don't leave us, man!" called Paul Snowe; "tell us what happened to your mother and the other cow?"

"Find out!" said Joe shortly. "What's the use o' tellin' a story when you're too stupid to understand it? I wouldn't tell you another word if you was to bust!" And with this spirited announcement, the young gentleman gave his pantaloons an indignant hitch, and repaired to the kitchen.

Another hour passed, and the uproar grew fast and furious. Joe listened with a smile and a muttered "it will soon be over," and patiently bided his time.

Gradually the noise died away. Now and then a heavy sound would be heard, as one of the drunken revelers fell prostrate on the floor, and a long-drawn snore betrayed his profoundly drunken sleep. Joe went in softly. Lying under the table, and in various directions through the room, where De Lisle's gallant band. Paul Snowe lay back in his seat, his head down on his breast, sleeping as profoundly as the rest.

Joe seized the jar, considerably lighter now, and repaired with in in the direction where the prisoners were confined. Leaning against the walls, half asleep, were the remaining three who had been left to guard them.

"Who comes?" cried one of the sentinels, opening his sleepy eyes.

"Only me, Ben—Joe Smith. The other chaps drunk theirselves asleep, and I brought the jar here, thinking you might like the rest."

"Thanky, Joe; may you never die till your time comes," said the man, as he, together with his companions, gathered around the jug.

"Don't see any reason why them coves upstairs should have all the fun to themselves," said the other, taking a long draft.

"That was my notion exactly," said Joe.

"Prime that!" said the third, smacking his lips.

"Joe, you deserve to be made an archbishop."

Joe took the compliment with all humility, and looked with delight at their eagerness to empty the jug. Very soon its effects became apparent, for the three worthy sentinels lay stretched at full length, as sound asleep as their companions upstairs.

Joe arose softly, and taking the keys from the belt of one, opened the nearest door, and Fred Stanley stepped forth. He then noiselessly opened the other two, and Nugent Percival and Gus made their appearance.

Joe made a motion for them to be silent, and lifting the lamp, beckoned them to follow.

"Wait here a minute," said Joe, when they arrived before the useful little side door, as he opened it and disappeared.

"That small youth is worth his weight in diamonds," remarked Gus, as Joe disappeared.

"He reminds me strangely of some one I've seen before," said Percival; "but whom I cannot recollect."

"Just fancy De-Lisle's disappointment when he comes back, losing his prisoners and his bride! Eh, Stanley?" said Gus.

"What?" said Fred, rousing with a start from a dream of Edith.

"Ah! I fancy I know where your thoughts were that time," said Gus, while Percival smiled slightly, but said nothing.

"Here we are," said Joe, reappearing, followed by Edith, wrapped in a large cloak, and leaning on the arm of Elva.

There was but little time for congratulations. As the whole party passed through the gate, Joe gave Elva a nudge in the ribs, saying, in a very audible whisper:

"S'posin' you and me goes and gets spliced right off! Where's the use losin' time?"

"Thank you; I guess I won't mind it just now!" said Elva, laughing and blushing, as she caught the dark eye of young Percival fixed upon her with a look of decided amusement.

"We part here then," said Joe, extending his hand. "Good-by, Elva. Have you no message to send to Glory Ann?"

To the surprise of all, he had suddenly lost his peculiar nasal twang. Fred, who had been watching him earnestly, came forward, and laying his hand on Joe's shoulder, said:

"Further disguise is unnecessary. I know you!"

Joe laughed, and colored slightly, as he lifted his cap and removed his wig, and in spite of the dye on his face, they beheld and recognized the merry face and black eyes of Nell Percival!

CHAPTER V.

THE JOURNEY HOME.

"Oh, she is a shrewd one!—as keen as a briar:

Though her lips pout with love, they *can* curl with disdain;

And her eye, now so soft, can shoot quivering fire.

Ah! she's a shrewd one!"—J. W. H.

"Nell, by all that's glorious!" exclaimed Gus.

"Is it possible!" ejaculated Edith, almost transfixed with amazement.

"I thought I had heard that voice before," said Nugent, scarcely less astonished.

"Is she a girl or a boy?" said Elva, turning from one to the other, completely bewildered.

"A girl, my dear, a girl!" said Nell gayly; "and I hope you won't forget you've promised to marry me. If you do, why then I'll call you out, and we'll have pistols before coffee, as sure as shooting."

"But Glory Ann," said Elva.

"Ah, yes—poor thing! But we won't pursue the harrowing subject just now, having no time to lose," said Nell. Then, lowering her voice, she added hurriedly: "Can you give me other garments? I don't wish—that is——"

"Oh, to be sure!" interrupted Elva; "we will help ourselves to horses from De Lisle's stables,

and you can come home with me while the rest wait in the forest. We won't be long."

A few minutes saw them on their way, Nell and Elva far ahead of the rest.

"We had better wait for them here," said Percival, suddenly halting.

"Who would ever think Nell so clever?" said Gus, in a tone of delight.

"Seeing that cleverness does not generally run in our family," said Nugent, laughing.

"Pon my honor, I'd never imagine it. She visited me daily, too, and I gave her a decided blowing up once or twice," said Gus.

"She told me of that," said Edith smiling, "and seemed quite indignant about it."

"I say, Edith, who is that pretty little dear she has gone off with?" inquired Percival.

"Why, it's Elvena Snowe, the daughter of one of De Lisle's men, for whose unfailing kindness I shall ever be grateful," replied Edith.

"I hope we will not be kept here much longer," said Gus. "Had I not better ride forward and meet them?"

"Meet them—meet Nell, you mean," said Percival, laughing.

"Here they come," said Fred, whose quick ear had caught the sound of horses' feet in the distance.

In a few moments more the young girls rode

up. Nell arrayed in a neatly-fitting riding habit of Elva's, the bright face flushed a little now that the paint was off, as they could see even in the moonlight.

"I have coaxed Elva to come back and bid you all good-by," said Nell. "Would you believe it, she actually did not wish to come!"

"You would not have treated us that way, dear Elva," said Edith, kissing her fair brow. "How I wish you could come home with us altogether!"

"Yes, do, Elva; we'll have such glorious times; you and I and—Glory Ann!" coaxed Nell.

"I cannot," said Elva, almost sadly; "but I hope to see you all once more. You had better hasten now—delay is dangerous."

The adieux were hastily spoken. Waving her hand in a last farewell, Elva turned and rode off down the forest path.

There was silence for a while, during which the party gained the high road, Nell in advance, between Gus and her brother, and Fred and Edith following rapidly.

"And now, Nell, tell us about this strange affair of your masquerade," said Gus, at length.

"Well, it's nothing to make a fuss about," said Nell. "I suppose I needn't tell you that when you went off that day, you didn't come back as we expected. Papa was away, and mamma was making a great time about it. I tried to cheer

her up, but 'twas all of no use; she insisted the whole four of you must be dead."

"Pon my honor, we came pretty near it," said Gus.

"Well, the day passed, and none of you came. Mamma was in a dreadful way, to be sure, and some of her friends came to visit and console her. I knew she wouldn't want me, with so many to look after her, so I asked and obtained leave of absence for a week or two, and as I was always fond of adventure, I determined, like a second Don Quixote, to go off in search of you."

"Bravo, Nell!" exclaimed Percival.

"I knew how to find the old house, and felt pretty sure Edith was there, at least, though I confess I had my doubts whether you three had not been sent to 'kingdom come.' I determined to disguise myself; and, having colored my face, and procured that horrid tow wig, I dressed myself in a suit of clothes procured for the occasion. Before venturing into the power of De Lisle, I determined to see if any one would recognize me, and I actually chatted for an hour with mamma, about the farm 'to hum,' and 'Glory Ann Lazybones,' without being recognized. So of course I knew my disguise was perfect; and I came, saw, conquered. That's all!"

"My Jove! Nell," cried Gus, delightedly, "you're a——"

"What?" said Nell.

"A regular stunner!" was the reply.

"Well, I consider that anything but a compliment," said Nell; "and rest assured, Master Gus, I should never have taken the trouble of going there to save you, but as it was just the same to take you along with the rest, I thought I might as well do it. Being wonderfully amiable, I'm always willing to oblige people when it's no trouble to myself!"

Conversing gayly thus, they rode along until the red hue of coming morn appeared in the east.

"Fred and Edith seem to have quite a nice time of it behind there," said Nell, looking back; "I expect they're saying a lot of pretty things to each other."

"Suppose we follow their example," said Gus.

"Perhaps I am *de trop*," observed Percival, smiling.

"Here they come!" said Nell; "wonder if they overheard us?"

At this moment Fred and Edith rode rapidly up. The keen dark eyes of Nell saw in a moment that her sister had been weeping, and that Fred looked unusually flushed and agitated.

Extending his hand to Nell, he said briefly:

"We part here, I believe. Allow me to bid you farewell."

"What! going to leave us?" exclaimed Gus and

Percival, while Nell, completely astonished, silently retained his hand, and Edith bent her head still lower to hide her falling tears.

"Yes, I must be at N—— to-morrow," answered Fred.

"But I thought you were coming home with us," said Percival.

"I regret I cannot do so. My presence here is no longer required, and business obliges me to go to N——. Good-by, Miss Ellen," he added, with a smile, "give my best wishes to Glory Ann. Farewell, Percival. Gus, when shall I expect to see you?"

"Let's see, a week at the furthest," replied Gus.

"Very well! Until then, au revoir! Adieu, Miss Percival."

Her lips moved, but her reply was not audible. The next moment he was galloping rapidly off in the opposite direction.

"Now, that's what I call real mean of him," said Nell, pouting, "to go off and leave us that way. I don't care if he was twice as handsome as he is, I wouldn't have anything to do with such a fiery-headed fellow for any possible inducement."

"Very glad to hear it, my dear," said Gus.

"Well then, you needn't be, my dear. For, indeed, I'd no more have you than him."

"Oh, come now, Nell, you don't mean it!"

"Oh, come now, Gus, I do mean it! And I'd thank you not to be so confident that I'm dying about you, for the future. If I choose to amuse myself flirting with you, for want of any one else, you're not to imagine I care one pin for you, I'd have you know."

"My dear Nell, if I thought you were serious, I'd take up the first broken ramrod I could find, and blow my brains out."

"My dear Gus, you can do as you please; only as you happen, unfortunately, to have no brains, I don't see how you're going to blow them out. Seems to me, if I were you, I'd try to blow a few *in*, instead of blowing them out."

"Nell, be serious."

"Gus, I am serious, awfully serious, as you'll find out to your cost."

"I know you just do this to torment me, you little vixen. But do try and be good-natured for once, Nell; you know I must leave you in a day or two, 'and be off to the wars again.'"

"Dear knows, I'll be glad to be rid of you," said Nell, in all sincerity.

Gus looked hurt, so much so, that Nell looked up, and exclaimed:

"There, gracious me! You needn't look so sulky about it. Of course, I'll be glad when you go off, for all my other friends of the masculine

persuasion were afraid to pay me the slightest attention, lest they should be wasting their 'sweetness on the desert air,' that is to say, on somebody else's property. And I'll tell you what you'll do, Gus," she added, as though struck by a sudden thought, "go off and try if you can't captivate Elva Snowe. She's a nice little thing, and almost as pretty as I."

"I'd rather have you, Nell."

"Oh, I dare say; but you see you can't have me, Gus. It is not everybody in this vale of tears can get such a prize as I am, not to be egotistical. Well, dear me! won't this be an adventure to talk of? Why, I don't believe one of your wonderful Lady Aramintas in the romances could have done it better."

"Nor half so well, my dear."

"I always had an immense respect for Joan of Arc," went on Nell, "but I'll begin to admire myself after I perform two or three more wonderful deeds of arms. How hot it is! Poor Edith droops like a flower wilted in the sun."

"I hope you're not going to take to poetry, Nell; if you do——"

"Don't be alarmed, Gus; I have too much respect for the feelings of my family to be guilty of such a thing; but poor Edith does look dreadfully used up."

"There is an inn not far from here," ob-

served Gus. "I think we can procure a carriage of some description there, that will convey you and Edith home. You must be tired, too, Nell."

"Not a bit. I'm never tired, but we must try to get one for Edith. Wait, I'll tell her."

Nell drew up, and waited until the others had reached her, then in a few words she communicated her wishes to her brother.

"Yes, that will be best," said Percival; "Edith does look worn out. How far is the inn from here, Gus?"

"Not more than a mile," replied Gus, "we will soon reach it."

A few minutes brought them to it, and after waiting for breakfast, they resumed their journey, Edith and Nell comfortably seated in a light wagon, with Gus driving, while Nugent galloped on to announce the news at home.

There was a joyful meeting at Percival Hall that night. Nell was decidedly the lion of the evening, and bore her honors with edifying indifference. Major Percival, who had only returned a few hours before, was in raptures, and declared she was "every inch a Percival." Mrs. Percival gazed upon her with moistened eyes as she thought of the narrow escape of her children, and the numerous friends of the family were extravagant in their eulogisms of her conduct.

Edith lay on the sofa, utterly prostrated in

body and mind, too wearied for the exertion of speaking, and with her eyes shut she listened, while her thoughts were far away. There was one wanting to make that family circle complete—one whose name all avoided mentioning.

A few days restored Edith to her wonted health, again a soft bloom began to mantle her pale cheek, and her blue eyes grew bright and radiant once more. A happy circle gathered in the parlor of Percival Hall each evening, the past making it seem more happy by contrast.

But leaving the inmates of Percival Hall, we must follow the changing fortunes of Fred Stanley.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HERMIT'S PREDICTION.

"My heart is with my native land,
My song is for her glory;
Her warriors' wreath is in my hand,
My lips breathe out her story.
Her lofty hills and valleys green
Are smiling bright before me,
And like a rainbow-sign is seen
Her proud flag waving o'er me.

The little village of Grassfield was in an unusual state of excitement. Groups of old men, boys, and women were scattered in every direction, talking over, with exultation, the latest news from the seat of war. A splendid victory had been gained by the American troops, the news of which had just reached Grassfield; and now the matter was being discussed in all its bearings by the delighted villagers.

In the barroom of the "Bottle and Bowl," the one solitary inn which the village contained, was assembled the collective wisdom of Grassfield. The hostess, a pretty little black-eyed woman, bustled in and out, attending to her guests, occasionally stopping to glance in the cradle where a tiny item of humanity lay, with wide open eyes, making desperate exertions to swallow its own tiny fists.

The unusual sound of a horse galloping rapidly along the street caused the whole assembly to rush pell-mell to the door. The horseman drew up, and consigning the animal to the hostler, passed through the gaping crowd, and entered the barroom.

Pretty Mistress Rosie, the hostess, who was busily washing glasses behind the counter, no sooner beheld him than, with an exclamation of joy, she dropped her towel, and running forward seized him by both hands, exclaiming: "Why, Mr. Fred, how do you do? I'm delighted to see you! I am indeed! Where have you been this long time? Fighting with the rest, I suppose! Well, well, who'd have thought it? Sit down, sit down! Well, I declare, I am glad. Did you see my Josh lately? No, I s'pose you didn't though, or he'd mentioned it. He's off, fighting like the rest, he is indeed! I had a letter from him last night; and he says he's quite well, and expects to be home soon. Well, this is a surprise! Dear me; how glad I am to see you. But sit down, la me! sit down, Mr. Fred. I declare, I've kept you standing all this time!"

And having by this time talked herself quite out of breath, the bustling little woman danced out a chair, and flinging her apron over it to blow off the dust, permitted Fred Stanley—for he it was—to sit down.

"And how are all my friends, Mrs. Wilde," he said with a smile; "for yourself I need not ask, for I see you are looking as blooming and handsome as ever."

"Oh, to be sure," said the lively little woman, "what would hinder me? All your friends are well, too, and Betsey Higgins is married to the tailor—you remember her, don't you? The little milliner that used to be in love with you. There, you needn't be laughing now; if you had been in Betsey's place, I guess you wouldn't see anything in it to laugh at. But, bless me! I forgot to show you the baby. He's named after you, too; for everybody says he's your born image."

Fred laughed, as he glanced down at the little fat, red face, framed in an enormous cap frill. Mrs. Wilde—evidently delighted at the striking resemblance between the tall form, and dark, handsome frace of Fred, and the little blinking atom, his namesake—lifted up the baby and deposited him, with a jerk, into his arms.

"There!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilde, folding her arms and nodding her head in a very satisfied manner, "if he ain't your very picter. It takes after you everyway, too, for it's the quietest, blesseddest, young one——"

Here a loud, shrill yell from the blesseddest young one himself interrupted its mamma's eulogium. Fred, who seemed rather afraid of it

than otherwise, glanced apprehendingly at Mrs. Rosie.

"Ah, you aggravatin' little monkey, you are," said that lady, snatching it from Fred with one hand and giving it a shake, "stop that yellin,' or I'll give you such a spankin' as ye never had in all your born days. There, lie in that, then, if you won't," she added, dropping it into the cradle, and leaving it to its own reflections.

Baby, who seemed quite accustomed to this kind of treatment, immediately stopped crying, and became so absorbed in contemplating its own little fat fists as to forget all minor considerations.

"I suppose, Mr. Fred, you're going to stay all night?" inquired Mrs. Wilde, resuming the washing of her tumblers.

"I rather think not," said Fred doubtfully, "my horse is lame, so I was forced to come here. If I find he is well enough to proceed I will go on."

"If not, you'll stay; so we needn't thank you for your company," broke in the little hostess. "Hark! Here's somebody else, as I live, I never did know one to come unexpected, but another was sure to follow. Who's this I wonder?"

The wonder was speedily solved, for a young

man with an exceedingly soldierlike air walked the next instant into the barroom.

"Ah, is it possible? Captain Rogers, my dear fellow," said Fred, springing up and extending his hand.

"Stanley! What in the name of all that's wonderful, drove you here?" exclaimed the newcomer in surprise.

"Where did you expect I would be?" said Fred, smiling at his look of astonishment.

"With your regiment, to be sure! But hold on; I haven't seen my old sweetheart Rosie, yet. Ah! Rosie, here you are, as pretty as ever I see. Why didn't you send me an invitation to the wedding? Well, never mind, it's not too late to salute the bride yet!"

A sound box on the ear was his reward, while Mrs. Rosie's cheeks grew most becomingly red.

"What's this?" said the young man, who bore the little woman's indignation with most exemplary coolness, as his eye fell on the cradle—"a baby! La! What a comical little concern! I say, Rosie, you don't mean to say——"

But Rosie, who wasn't going to put up with his impudence, administered another box on the ear with no very gentle hand and, seizing baby, immediately decamped.

Captain Rogers looked after her and laughed.

"Did you know, Fred, Rosie and I kept up

quite a spirited flirtation winter before last. 'Pon my honor, I was quite spooney about her one time, too, but Josh Wilde came along and cut me out."

"I never knew you when you weren't spooney about some one," said Fred.

"Oh, to be sure! there's nothing like it. Don't you know what the song says?"

"I am in love with twenty,
I could adore as many more;
There's nothing like a plenty."

"You hardly find as much time to flirt now as you used to, I fancy," said Fred.

"Why no, not quite; but when an opportunity presents itself, I always improve it. By the way, Fred, they say old Percival has two or three very pretty daughters. Pshaw, man! Never redden so; I intend to cultivate the old gentleman the first chance I get, for the sake of ma'amselle Estelle—Edith—what's her name?"

"You may spare yourself the trouble, my very dear friend. She would not notice you."

"Don't believe it," said Captain Rogers, glancing at the mirror. "Never knew a female heart could resist me yet! But *nous verrons mon ami!* When have you seen Ralph de Lisle?"

Fred started at the name.

"Why, what of him?" he demanded.

"Oh, nothing, only they say you've cut him out there. Serve him right, too; he's an infernal villain!"

"Have you seen him lately?" said Fred, biting his lips to repress his impatience.

"Saw him yesterday with young Bates, out on some expedition of mischief. But, Stanley, is it really true that you've won his ladylove from him?"

"Captain Rogers, if you wish us to remain friends, you will say no more on this subject," said Fred sternly.

"Whew!" with a prolonged whistle. "You're confoundedly touchy, Stanley. Well, that's one proof you're guilty. And now may I ask if I can do so without offending you, whither are you bound?"

"To N—— to join my regiment."

"That's lucky! Are you in much of a hurry?"

"Why, no; not particularly."

"Then might I ask you to grant me a favor?"

"Certainly, my dear Rogers; anything in my power."

"Thank you, thank you," said Rogers eagerly. "These dispatches I have been ordered to convey to Colonel M——; but an affair of a most pressing nature requires my presence in another direction. Now if you would deliver them you would render me an inestimable service."

"With all my heart, my good fellow. Stand and deliver."

"It's rather a dangerous business," said Rogers, drawing a formidable looking document from his breast pocket. "You will have to make your way through the forest to reach Colonel M——'s quarters; and there are lurking parties of Indians and Tories forever prowling——"

"Say no more about it," interrupted Fred. "I am too well accustomed to danger to fear it; besides, who would shun danger in the service of his country?"

"You will start to-night I suppose?"

"Oh, certainly; there is no time to lose. Here comes our pretty hostess, so not a word!"

"Well, Rosie, I'll take a drink and be off. What have you done with that pocket edition of Josh Wilde?"

"None of your business, Will Rogers," replied Rosie saucily. "Here, take this, and be off; I can't be bothered with you."

Captain Rogers laughed, drained the glass she handed to him, chucked her under the chin, shouted a careless good-by to Fred, sprang on his horse, and amid many an admiring glance from the bright eyes of the village damsels rode off.

"I think I had better follow him," remarked Fred, turning carelessly from the window.

"You'll wait for dinner, won't you?" said Rosie. "Come now, I'll take no refusal. I have ever so many things to say to you. There, I knew you would," she added, as Fred smiled. "Just walk into the parlor, dinner'll be ready in a minute."

So saying she laughingly pushed Fred into the parlor, closing the door behind her, and leaving him to amuse himself during her absence as best he might.

Fred seated himself, and taking up a volume of Goldsmith's works was soon absorbed in the pages of "She Stoops to Conquer," when the door opened and Mistress Rosie stood before him.

"There's a gentleman out here inquiring for you, Mr. Fred," said the little hostess.

"For me?" said Fred, in surprise. "Who can it be?"

"He looks like some of those old robbers in the pictures," said Mrs. Wilde, "with a long cloak wrapped around him, and his hat pulled way down over his eyes. Will I show him in?"

"I suppose so," said Fred, inwardly wondering who the mysterious personage could be.

The door opened, and the figure of a man wrapped in a long, black cloak, with his hat pulled far down over his eyes, stood before him.

"To whom am I indebted for the honor of this visit?" said Fred, rising.

"To a friend, young man; one who is no stranger to you." He moved his hat, and Fred beheld the white locks of the Hermit of the Cliffs.

"A friend you have indeed proved to me, good father," said Fred, frankly extending his hand. "Even now you were in my thoughts, though I hardly expected the honor of this visit."

"You will ever find me near you when danger is at hand," said the hermit.

"Danger?" said Fred. "And what danger threatens me now?"

"A soldier's life is always dangerous," replied the old man evasively; "especially with so many enemies as you have."

"Let it come then," said Fred carelessly. "I am too well accustomed to danger to shrink from it now."

"Perhaps you think you carry a charmed life," said the hermit; "and that because you have escaped the bullet of the executioner, and the halter of De Lisle, you can rush into greater dangers, and come forth scatheless. Young man, I say to you, beware! Last night, when the stars rode in solemn splendor through the heavens, I read your fate. All was dark and ominous. *The shadow of the scaffold fell redly across your path.* The steel of the assassin is

sharpened for the heart of one you love, and for the crime of another shall you die. Again I say to you, beware! Be warned in time, else you shall repent it when too late!"

The deep, intense, passionate solemnity with which he spoke awed involuntarily the fearless heart of Fred. A sensation of fear, not for himself, but for one dearer than all the world beside, crept over him.

"Old man!" he exclaimed, seizing him by the wrist with a viselike grip, "who is this for whom the steel of the assassin is prepared? Speak, and tell me, for I must know."

"That I saw not," replied the hermit calmly. "Can the lips of man reveal what the stars speak not? Guard against the danger which hangs over yourself, and trust the rest to a higher power."

"Psha! I might have known 'twas but silly raving," said Fred, shaking off the superstitious feeling that had for a moment overcome him. "If you have nothing more definite than this to warn me against, good father, I fear your words have been in vain."

"And you'll not be warned?" said the old man sadly. "It is only when the danger is at hand you will believe me? Did I not warn you before, and did not my words prove true? Have you forgotten your powerful enemy, De Lisle?"

"I am not likely to forget him; but I fear him not," said Fred scornfully.

"So you said before," said the hermit calmly; "and yet you fell in his power, and would have died by his hand, but for the heroism of a young girl. The same thing may happen again, when there will be no one at hand to aid you."

"Forewarned is forearmed," said Fred. "Ralph de Lisle will find it not so easy to get me once more within his clutches; and should we ever meet in open warfare, then, good father, you will find it your duty to bid him beware instead of me!"

"Rash youth! You cannot read the book of fate as I can," said the hermit sorrowfully. "Again I tell you, danger is at hand—nay, hangs over your head, and over one for whom you would give your life. In the hour of doom you cannot say there was no one to warn you of your danger."

The tone of profound melancholy in which the last words were uttered touched Fred. Not that he believed what the old man said, his words he considered the mere idle raving of a moon-struck idiot, who warned him of danger after hearing of his narrow escapes, and knowing De Lisle was still his enemy. But his evident affection for him and interest in his fate reached his heart.

"Accept, at least, my thanks for the interest you manifest in me," said Fred; "although I may never make use of your warning, I feel grateful to you for it. And now, let me ask you why should you care so much for one who is a stranger to you, and whose father you have spoken of in the most opprobrious terms?"

A moment after he was sorry he had asked a question which seemed to act like a galvanic shock on the hermit, whose head fell heavily on his closed hands, while his whole frame quivered with emotion.

"My dear sir," said Fred, starting up, "if I have said anything to hurt your feelings, believe me it was quite unintentional, and I am sincerely sorry for it."

"Say no more, say no more!" said the hermit, raising his head, and startling the young man by the deadly paleness of his face. "I am subject to these sudden shocks, and do not mind them. Some day, perhaps, before I die, should you survive me, you will know who I am. But until that time comes, let what you already know of me suffice. You think me crazed—perhaps I am; but there is at least 'method in my madness.' Believe me to be your friend—your best friend on earth. You say you are a stranger to me. Believe it not. Long before you saw me, I knew you; and when you least fancied it, I

have been watching over you. I ask neither your love nor confidence in return. Should we both live, the time will come when you will give both willingly. And now, farewell! I have come to warn you, but you heeded not my words. In the hour of your darkest trial, when your summer friends desert you in the winter of affliction, I shall be near. When danger threatens, look for me. Until then, farewell."

He wrapped his cloak around him, drew his hat down over his eyes, bowed with dignity and was gone ere Fred could frame an answer.

"Strange being!" thought the young man, throwing himself into a seat, and leaning his head on his hand. "How dark and mysterious are his words! Can it be that that simple old man really reads the secrets of futurity? 'Thou hast hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes.' Wonderful being! Will those ominous predictions come true? I have already seen his words verified, and why may not those likewise? 'The shadow of the scaffold falls across my path.' Well, though I have escaped twice, I begin to think I have been born for a halter, after all. I can easily account for my narrow escape from shipwreck by the wise old proverb, that any one born to be hanged will never be drowned. It's a pleasant anticipation, truly."

"Why, Mr. Fred, you look as dismal as if you had lost your last relation," said the merry voice of Rosie Wilde, breaking in upon his reverie. "Goodness gracious me! Have you seen a ghost, or are you thinking of suicide? If you are, I've a bottle of *lodhum* out in the bar that will send you sleeping comfortably to the other world in less than no time. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Egad! I've a strong notion to follow her advice, and cheat Jack Ketch, after all," muttered Fred.

"Well, dinner's ready, so never mind talking to yourself just now, for fear I might overhear you. So come along."

Fred laughingly accompanied Mrs. Wilde to the dining room, where they sat down to a comfortable meal, to which both did ample justice.

An hour after, as Fred stood in the parlor with Mrs. Wilde, previous to starting, another horseman galloped up and alighted at the inn door.

"I'll have General Washington himself here next, I expect," said Mrs. Wilde, who was rocking the cradle. "Your coming brought them all, I think; for I haven't had so many visitors before this month of Sundays."

"Landlady!" called a high, imperious voice, that made Fred start and flush to the temples.

"Coming, coming!" answered Mrs. Wilde, hurrying from the room.

Half an hour passed by. Fred stood with his arms folded across his breast, all his indifference gone, and a look of fierce sternness and intense hatred on his face. Well he recognized that voice.

"Gone at last," said Mrs. Wilde, again making her appearance.

Fred looked out, a young man passed out of the door, sprang on his horse and rode off, but not before Fred had caught a full view of his face.

It was Ralph de Lisle.

"Well, I regret to say I must leave you now, Mrs. Wilde," said Fred, turning from the window, and striving to banish the shadow that had gathered on his brow.

"Very sorry to hear it," said Mrs. Rosie, "but I hope to see you soon again."

"Rest assured of that, my dear madam," said Fred. "I shall certainly visit my little namesake as soon as may be. Good-by until we meet again."

Raising the plump little hand she extended to his lips, Fred passed out, sprang on his horse, and was soon out of sight, while the pretty little hostess of the "Bottle and Bowl" stood in the doorway, watching him until he disappeared.

Night found him making his way slowly and with difficulty along the slippery forest path in the direction pointed out by his friend, Captain Rogers. It was a gloomy, disagreeable night. A drizzling rain was falling, a cold wind was sighing drearily through the trees. There was no light, save the faint glow of the spectral moon, as she lifted her wan face over the bleak tree tops, through the dark clouds that scudded across the sky.

Urging his horse with rein and spur, Fred bent his head to the storm, and proceeded slowly onward. There was a strange presentiment of evil hanging over him, an oppression of spirits he had never felt before. It might have been caused by the words of the hermit, his chance glimpse of De Lisle, which he felt half inclined to consider an omen of evil, or it might have been caused by the dismal night and the lonely path he was pursuing. He strove to shake off these superstitious fancies, knowing there might be more tangible evils at hand, for there were always lurking bodies of Indians prowling about in the woods. Now and then the cry of some wild animal would break upon his ear, making his horse start and snort with terror, but no enemy had molested him, and ere morning he trusted to be far from danger.

Suddenly an abrupt turn in the road brought

him in view of a scene that made him draw back in alarm.

In the center of a large semicircle, evidently the work of Nature, a large fire was burning. Gathered around it were some twenty half-naked painted savages, who, with a large keg, which Fred well knew contained rum, were evidently bent upon making a night of it, in spite of the inclemency of the weather.

To escape without being discovered was now Fred's idea. He turned noiselessly to proceed in another direction, but his horse reared at the sudden blaze of light, and gave a loud neigh of fear.

It reached the keen ears of the Indians. Snatching up their weapons, they sprang to their feet, while a series of diabolical yells rent the air, followed by an ominous silence.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STAKE.

"Through the leafy halls of the wild old wood,
Rang an echo full and free.
To the savage shout of a fearful band,
As they bound the white man foot and hand
To the sacrificial tree."

—H. MARION STEPHENS.

Escape was now out of the question. Resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible, Fred drew his pistols, and two of the foremost savages, with wild howls, bit the ground. Madened by the sight, the remainder sprang fiercely upon him, and in spite of his desperate resistance, he was overpowered by numbers and securely bound. They next turned their attention to their fallen companions. One of them was only wounded, but the other was quite dead. A long, low wail was heard, as he who appeared to be their chief touched the fresh scalp lock which dangled at his belt.

The savages now gathered in a cluster, and appeared to hold a consultation, while Fred, bound to a tree, inwardly wondered what Dame Fortune had in store for him next. In the red light of the fire, the scene resembled one of *Salvator Rosa's* wild paintings. The dark, gloomy

forest in the background, through which the wind sighed a dirgelike chant. The wild faces, gleaming eyes, and horribly-painted bodies of his captors, giving them the look of demons in the lurid glow of the fire.

Fred waited eagerly for the result of this conference. Now and then he would catch some fierce exclamation, but as they spoke in their own language, he, of course, understood not a word. Often, too, he would catch a look directed to himself that boded him no good. At last they seemed to have arrived at some conclusion; for, rising to their feet, they returned to their former places round the fire, glaring savagely upon him as they passed.

Left alone, Fred was soon lost in thought. He seemed to himself a mere football in the hands of Fate, to be tossed wherever the fickle goddess willed. In the power of the Indians he well knew that death, speedy and bloody, must be his doom. Death and he had been too often face to face for him to shrink from it now; but to die thus, afar from all who ever knew or cared for him, might have chilled the stoutest heart. To die on the field of battle, fighting for his country, would have been glory; but such a death as he well knew was now in store for him was indeed appalling. He thought of Edith, freed from the power of her mortal foe, and happy at

home, and wondered if she would ever hear of his fate. He thought of the mysterious hermit, and of his dark prediction of coming danger so soon fulfilled.

He turned his eyes to where sat his captors. Some of them, overpowered by the effects of the fire water, were stretched on the ground asleep, looking like dark statues in their rigid repose. The others still sat drinking, some whooping and yelling fearfully in their intoxication, the rest silently staring at them, evidently more than half stupefied.

Fred's position was painful in the extreme. The ligatures which bound his wrists behind him were tied so tightly that they seemed cutting their way into the flesh. His position was painfully constrained, his head being the only portion of his body he could move.

To add to his sufferings, the storm, which had for several hours been threatening, now burst in all its fury. A blaze of lightning, so vivid that it seemed as though the heavens were one vast sheet of flame, followed by a terrific crash of thunder and flood of rain, and the storm was upon them in full fury. Roused from their slumbers, the stunned and half-drunken savages gathered together in evident dismay. The wind howled a perfect tornado, the lightning still flashed in one continual glare, the thunder pealed

as though the heavens were rending asunder, and the rain fell in torrents. A tall tree, scarcely three yards from where Fred stood, was shivered to atoms by a blinding flash, and another was torn violently up by the roots and hurled almost at his feet.

For nearly two hours the storm continued in all its fury. Then the sullen clouds began slowly to break away, the lightning still flashed, but at rare intervals; the thunder growled far off in the distance, the wind abated its fury, and though the rain still fell, it was no longer in drenching torrents. The savages recovering from the effects of their first alarm, and still stupid with liquor, again stretched themselves on the wet ground, and soon lay motionless, like hideous figures in wax.

Fred, wet, cold, and benumbed, stood waiting the approach of day. His arms felt as though they were dead, having swollen from being so tightly bound. As he thought of the fearful fate for which he was most probably reserved, he had more than once during the raging of the storm wished that some friendly flash of lightning had freed his spirit and borne him from their power.

The hours of that dreary night wore on, but Fred thought it the longest he had ever known. The gray light of morning at last stole over the

tree-tops, coming slowly and unwillingly, as though reluctant to behold the disasters of the preceding night. Fred recollected that at that time, twenty-four hours before, he had bade adieu to Edith, and something akin to despair filled his heart as the certainty that he should never see her again stole over him.

His captors had by this time arisen, and were now busily engaged in making their morning meal. This over, some of them went in search of their horses where they had left them the preceding night, while two others approached the prisoner, and having unfastened the thongs which bound him, placed before him a sort of hard, coarse cake made of Indian corn, a gourd filled with water, and made signs for him to eat.

It was some time before he could comply, for his hands were stiff and benumbed, and the food none of the most palatable. Knowing, however, that Nature must be sustained, he essayed to eat; and by the time he had finished his meal the rest returned with the horses.

Fred was permitted to mount his own horse; and with one of his captors on each side of him they dashed off at a rapid gallop.

They rode on for several hours, avoiding with the utmost care all white settlements, and a little before noon they halted at a running stream to rest their wearied animals. Fred alighted, and

was bound as before to prevent his escaping, while his captors once more regaled themselves with their coarse food.

All traces of the previous night's storm had now vanished. The sun shone in unclouded splendor, and at any other time Fred would have admired the beautiful scene around him, but now his eyes were fixed on his captors.

They were a savage, bloodthirsty looking set, hideously painted and frightfully ugly, looking fiercer and more barbarous in the clear light of day than when he had seen them first. They ate in solemn silence, and having finished again mounted and rode off, seldom speaking save when he who appeared to be their chief addressed to them a few brief words, evidently concerning their journey.

Toward evening the party halted, and made preparations for the night. Fred was again bound, but in such a manner as would permit him to lie down. The savages then proceeded to kindle a fire; and seating themselves around it, after partaking of their evening meal, of which Fred received a share, they stretched themselves on the damp earth and were soon buried in sleep, with the exception of one who remained to keep guard.

It was a lovely night. The moon rode in radiant brightness through the blue arch of heaven.

One by one the solemn stars came out, looking with their pitying eyes on the pale face of the captive. The cool south wind lifted his long, dark locks off his noble brow. The air was redolent with the odor of flowers, and with a sing-song sound in his ears, Fred fell asleep.

And sleeping, he dreamed. Once again in fancy he stood by the side of Edith, whispering in her ear "the tale which ladies love to hear." Suddenly a shadow fell across the path. Edith was torn from his side, and with the rapidity of thought he found himself swinging by the neck from a halter. A shriek of mortal agony reached his ears, and looking down he beheld Edith struggling in the arms of De Lisle, now transformed into a painted savage. With a start he awoke, to find his dream in part realized.

The red hue of coming morn was already crimsoning the sky. His captors were up and gathered together in a circle, as if holding a consultation. Among them, Fred beheld the fierce faces of three or four of De Lisle's Tory band; and standing above him, with his arms folded across his breast, and a look of fiendish triumph on his face, Ralph de Lisle himself.

"So," said De Lisle, slowly hissing the words through his closed teeth, "so, Fred Stanley, we have met again."

"So it seems," replied Fred, calmly.

"You see, sir, you are in the hands of Fate, and that you cannot escape me. No doubt you fancied, when you so cleverly freed yourself from my power, that you were safe. Now you are convinced of your mistake. Since our last meeting, I have daily prayed I might soon hold you in my clutches once more, and now my prayer is granted."

"Which proves that your master, the devil, is good to his own," said Fred.

"You are pleased to be facetious, my good friend. Well, I can excuse that in one whose hours are numbered. Fred Stanley, Dame Fortune has favored you long. One time I almost fancied you bore a charmed life; but Fate can bear you no further than the end, and your hour has come. For your present risk you have no one to thank but yourself, and, being such a hot-headed fool, our dusky friends yonder will prevent your getting into any more scrapes, by sending you to heaven where you belong, the first opportunity. Dream no longer that you can escape. Yonder sun, which is rising, you will never see set. Ere three hours we will have reached the Indian village, where the stake is prepared, and your doom is sealed. No power, either in heaven or earth, can save you now. And if as you say, the devil is my master, I most sincerely thank him for preserving you

from the rope, since it has reserved you for the far more horrible fate of death by slow torture. I shall faithfully, like a true friend, stand by you to the last, and witnessing your death agony console you by the agreeable information, that in spite of Fate, Edith Percival shall yet be mine. Doubtless she imagines, as you did a few hours ago, that she has escaped me forever. Like you, she will find her mistake ere long; and I swear she shall repent in dust and ashes for her scorn of me. Ha! You change color. I thought that would touch you. I see you can fear for her though not for yourself. Well, every indignity that woman can endure shall be hers, until your dainty ladylove shall weep for the hour she was born."

De Lisle paused, while his eyes actually blazed. An infernal spirit might have envied the diabolical triumph that shone in his face.

"Villain! Monster! Devil!" cried Fred, almost maddened by his words. "An hour of fearful reckoning will yet come for all this."

"You are disposed to moralize, my dear Stanley," said De Lisle, with his usual mocking sneer. "Well, doubtless the near approach of death does incline men that way. As for the future reckoning you threaten me with, believe in it if you will; as for me, I have a spirit above such hypocritical whining and preacher's cant. However,

I will not argue the matter now, as in a few hours you will have an opportunity of knowing which of us is right. If, when you reach the other world, you really do see the gentleman in black—my master, you know—just give him my compliments, and tell him I trust he will always remain as true to me as he has up to the present. Ah! Here comes my friend, Long Knife—suggestive name, isn't it? I will leave you to meditation and prayer, hoping you will offer up a good word for Edith and *me*, while I consult with yonder dusky chieftain." And lifting his hat with mock politeness, De Lisle turned on his heel and strode away.

It would be impossible to give an idea of the torrent of fiery, passionate, maddening thoughts that leaped in burning chaos through the brain of Fred. The image of Edith in the power of De Lisle, that demon in human form, was ever before him. And he knew of the fate in store for her, and yet was unable to assist her. He grew maddened, frenzied at the thought, and struggled to burst his bonds until, finding all his efforts ineffectual, he sank back exhausted.

Standing at a few yards distant, talking to an Indian who, from the number of feathers waving from his scalp lock, appeared to be a chief of unusual distinction, stood De Lisle. He saw the impression his words had made, and the

smile of gratified hatred on his lips and the light of triumphant malice in his eyes made him appear more of a demon than ever.

After a few moments rapid conversation the parties separated, and, mounting their horses, prepared to start. Fred rose as before, guarded by two of the Indians. De Lisle put himself at the head of his own men, not more than half a dozen in number, and all dashed off.

For over three hours they rode on rapidly, and almost in silence. Now and then De Lisle would turn to converse with the man Paul Snowe, who formed one of his party, but this was only at intervals, and each seemed too much absorbed in his own reflections to talk.

At length, as they reached the summit of a high hill, the whole party drew rein and paused for a moment. Below them lay an Indian village, enveloped by hills, and forming a sort of circle of thirty huts or thereabouts. The whole population of the village seemed to have turned out to meet them, and with wild shouts more than half of Fred's captors dashed off, leaving him with De Lisle's men and the others to follow more slowly.

As Fred neared the village he turned to gaze on them, and was forced to think that a more repulsive-looking set he had never beheld. The women were even worse than the men, with their

flat, unintellectual-looking faces, dirty persons, and savage, un pitying eyes. Every look was bent upon him as he rode past, but all were fierce and stern, and even the children seemed to glare with their dark eyes as fiendishly as their parents.

One of the Indians made a sign for Fred to dismount, and bidding him follow, led the way toward one of the huts, the crowd opening right and left to allow them to pass. Pushing aside the skin which served for a door, he motioned him to enter, and then binding him hand and foot, he seated himself beside the entrance to keep guard, his scowling black eyes fixed on his prisoner, with the steady gaze of a basilisk.

Fred had made no resistance, knowing it would be worse than useless; and now he sat with his eyes fixed upon the ground, striving to collect his thoughts and think calmly. In vain; all was wild confusion in his heart and brain; everything seemed red and dancing before his eyes. Death, death! seemed written in fiery characters everywhere he turned. Never had he felt so dreadful a certainty that his last hour was come, than when sitting there expecting each moment to be led forth to the stake. He felt at that bitter moment that De Lisle's words were true, and that it would have been better to have died by the halter than to be reserved for the fearful doom now in store for him. His bodily suffer-

ing almost equaled the mental, for the ligatures which bound him were cutting into the quivering flesh, and his posture was so constrained that he could not move. He strove to pray, but the hated image of De Lisle, at such times, would rise before him, driving away the pitying form of his good angel, and filling his mind with fierce, bitter thoughts.

And so two or three hours passed away. His savage jailer still crouched at the entrance, glaring upon him with his eyes of fire, his half-naked body and scarred face giving him the appearance of some hideous painting, rather than a living man. Now and then a bright ray of sunshine would steal in through some chink, falling like an angel hand on the black, glossy locks of the captive. There was a drowsy stillness in the air, rendered more oppressive by the dull, monotonous hum that came from the village. At length a profound stillness for a few moments succeeded. Fred listened in wonder, and even his guard betrayed some sign of interest. They could almost hear each other breathe, so profound was the stillness, when, lo! a yell so fierce, so savage, so diabolical that it seemed to come from the depths of Pandemonium, broke upon their ears. With an answering cry the Indian guard sprang to his feet and turned to Fred with such a look of fiendish triumph that he

could no longer doubt what these shouts purported. They were his death warrant.

A moment after and the skin at the entrance was burst rudely aside, and two fierce-looking warriors entered and spoke a few words to the guard, who immediately rushed from the hut. Then approaching Fred, they severed his bonds and made signs for him to rise. With some difficulty he obeyed, for his limbs were cramped and painful in the extreme. Then motioning him to follow they led the way into the air.

It was a golden summer day. The sun shone in a sky of unclouded blue, and poured a glow of light and heat over the green earth. The air was heavy with the odor of flowers, and the clear chirping of numberless birds mingled gently with the dreamy murmur of the trees. Never had Nature appeared so lovely to him before, as he cast one long, last, lingering look around.

A series of unearthly yells greeted him as he appeared. The whole population of the village, warriors, squaws, and papooses, had assembled around a large stake firmly driven in the yielding earth, and were glaring upon him with their fierce eyes.

Around the stake was a pile of fagots ready to be set on fire, and leading him toward it they bound his arms firmly behind him to the stake.

Almost unknown to himself, there had been hitherto a wild hope still lingering in Fred's breast—a hope that Fate or rather Providence had not reserved him for a doom so fearful. But now the last faint spark of hope died out, and with it went all his wild, tumultuous thoughts, and a deep, settled calm took their place.

He looked up. Before him stood De Lisle, his arms folded across his breast, gazing upon him with his evil eyes. The sneering smile of a demon was on his face, all the intense hatred and revenge he had ever cherished glowed in his features, and a light of intense malignity glittered in his serpentlike eyes.

"Well, Fred Stanley, we have met for the last time," he said mockingly. "You see now the death you were born for, your doom is to roast alive by a slow fire."

Fred made no reply. Fixing his eyes on De Lisle's face he gazed upon him so long and so steadily that involuntarily De Lisle quailed before him. It was but for a moment, however, and recovering himself he went on.

"And have you no message to send to Edith? I go from here to-night, and with the help of my master, before referred to, I shall carry her off in spite of them all, to where they will never again behold her. Look as fierce as you please,

my good fellow; I rather enjoy it than otherwise, since it tells me you feel. Once, had I not hated you so intensely, with a hatred that became part of my very being, I could have envied you for the heart you had won, a heart which I will yet trample under my feet, until your fate will seem an enviable one compared with hers. She despised me, spurned me with contempt for the gay, the handsome, the fascinating, the gallant Fred Stanley, and in her turn she will learn what it is to be spurned. No one who has ever yet injured me escaped. To the very ends of the earth I would follow them like a bloodhound following a trail, until I had wreaked my vengeance. You wronged me, insulted me, and you see the result—a fate so dreadful that manhood must shudder to contemplate it will be yours. Her turn comes next, for now that you stand on the threshold of eternity, I swear to you, Fred Stanley, that neither Heaven nor earth can turn me from my purpose.”

“Monster!” exclaimed Fred, in a voice that sounded low and unnatural with intense horror, “is this the return you make for all Major Percival has done for you? For myself, I neither have nor shall ask for mercy from you, fiend that you are, I would not accept it if offered, but gratitude to the old man who has been more than a father to you, should restrain you from a crime

that even these bloodthirsty savages around us would shrink from committing. Man, man! If there is one spark of human nature in your fiendish heart, you will not bring the gray hairs of that old man with sorrow to the grave."

"Ha, ha! And Fred Stanley can plead for the man who spurned him like a dog!" laughed De Lisle scornfully. "If you continue in this strain I shall begin to think you are a saint. Your eloquence is quite lost, my good friend; that one spark of human nature you see does not exist in my fiendish heart. Say, my friend, was it not for pretty Edith you were pleading that time instead of her doting old fool of a father? Spare him!—ha, ha!—why, I have a long score against him, too, that must be wiped out by a few of his doubloons. When he refused to compel his lovesick daughter to marry me I vowed vengeance against him as well as the rest; and, as I don't like to be in anybody's debt, I shall take care to cancel it as soon as possible."

"If there ever was a devil in human form it is you, Ralph de Lisle!" exclaimed Fred, with a look of hatred and loathing; "to pursue thus with the vengeance of a tiger an old man and a helpless girl for some fancied wrong. Had it been a man—but old age and helplessness. Oh, coward!"

De Lisle's face grew livid with rage, as he

half drew a pistol and advanced a step toward him.

Fred observed the action, and his heart bounded with the hope that in his rage De Lisle might shoot him, and thus save him from a more terrible fate.

The hope was in vain, however. De Lisle saw the quick gleam of his eye, and stepping back he replaced the pistol in his belt, saying in his customary sarcastic tone:

“No, don’t flatter yourself I’ll end your sufferings so speedily. I have no intention of depriving my good friends here of the pleasant scene they anticipate. I must confess it is rather new for me to allow any one to call me a coward, and let him escape immediate chastisement, but circumstances alter cases, you know. I perceive Long Knife approaching to give the signal for the fagots to be lighted, and our red-skinned friends are growing impatient. So farewell, Fred Stanley. I wish you a pleasant journey to the other world, and a cordial welcome when you arrive there!”

He bowed with most ceremonious politeness, and stepped aside as the savage chief approached. Waving his hand as a signal, one of the Indians advanced and thrust a light brand among the combustibles.

In a moment the whole pile **was in** a blaze.

With screeches and yells that can be likened to nothing earthly the savages joined hands and danced madly around the flames that rose crackling and blazing and roaring as though exulting in their power.

Fred raised his eyes to the bright sky above him for one farewell glance. It was such a glorious day, bright and radiant with sunlight.

Higher and higher rose the flames, fiercer and fiercer they blazed, faster and faster they spread, until he stood alone within a red, lurid circle of fire. The heat and smoke were beginning to grow unbearable, for the flames had not reached him. Fixing his eyes on the devouring monster, Fred silently committed his soul to Heaven. One last thought of Edith, and then all were turned to that dread unknown, to which he was so rapidly approaching.

The cries, whoops, yells and screeches of the savages each moment increased, as they danced madly outside the ring of fire. He scarcely heeded or heard them, until suddenly they died away. Every voice was arrested, the mad dance ceased, and all stood as if transfixed. Following the direction toward which every eye was now turned, Fred beheld a sight which filled him with amazement.

CHAPTER VIII.

A N A R R O W E S C A P E .

“Oh! ask me not to speak thy fate—
Oh! tempt me not to tell,
The doom shall make thee desolate,
The wrong thou mayst not quell.
Away! away! for death would be
Even as a mercy unto thee.”

The cause of their astonishment was soon explained. There, before them, like a spirit, in his flowing robes and snowy hair, stood the Hermit of the Cliffs!

With a grunt expressive of surprise and satisfaction, not unmingled with awe, the chief advanced to meet him. There was something truly imposing in the majestic appearance of the old man, his fantastic robes fluttering in the air, his long white hair and beard flowing over his shoulders. There was an evident reverence and respect for this singular old man in the hearts of the Indians, who looked upon him as a superior being, something more akin to the Great Spirit than to his fellow men.

Pointing toward the prisoner, the hermit addressed the chief in his own language, in a tone more of command than entreaty. At first his words were listened to impatiently, then angrily,

and finally with a sort of awe. As the hermit went on, increasing in vehemence, the warrior listened in superstitious silence, and when he had concluded he bowed his head, and, followed by the hermit, turned toward his own people, who had stood watching them during their conference with looks of mingled respect and curiosity, and began addressing them in their own language. As a matter of course, Fred understood not a word, but, from the savage eyes that were every now and then turned toward him, he judged he was the subject of their conversation.

Surprise first, and then rage, was depicted on every face, while knives and tomahawks were brandished, with fierce yells. But the loud, harsh voice of the chief made itself heard above the din in tones of anger and command. The warriors gradually relapsed into sullen silence, while every eye was directed toward the captive, glaring with concentrated passion and disappointment.

When the chieftain ceased, the hermit addressed the enraged crowd. High and clear like the silvery tones of a trumpet his voice rang out, soothing the waters of passion which the words of their chief had lashed into fury. As they listened, their noisy demonstrations of rage gave place to deep growls and sullen mutterings, while they glared like wild beasts upon Fred, whose po-

sition at the stake was now almost unbearable. As he folded his arms across his breast and ceased speaking the warriors fell sullenly back, and the chief himself, leaping over the burning circle, freed the bonds of Fred and motioned him to follow. No second invitation was necessary to make him leave his place of torture, and the next moment he stood beside the hermit, who scarcely gave him a single glance as he turned again and addressed the chief.

During these proceedings, which occupied but a few moments, De Lisle had stood watching them like one who cannot believe what he sees. Now he advanced to where the trio stood, and with a face perfectly livid with rage and disappointment he turned toward the hermit, and angrily exclaimed:

"Sir, what means this? By what devilish art have you bewitched these savages into giving up their prey?"

"It means, sir, that your evil machinations are again defeated by me. I use no devilish arts, as you well know, but there is a Power higher than that of man, a Power that can defeat man's most cunning scheme in its own good time!" answered the hermit, with grave dignity.

"Death and fury! Old man, cease your prattling!" exclaimed the maddened De Lisle. "Though this copper-colored fool here has given

him up, by Heaven! I will disappoint you yet, and you shall bear from hence but a dead carcase."

He drew a pistol as he spoke, but ere he could fulfill his threat it was struck from his hand by the chief, who brandished his tomahawk before his eyes with a fierce yell, and would doubtless have prevented his ever drawing another, but for the intervention of the hermit. Motioning De Lisle back with a majestic wave of the hand, he said:

"Away, sir! One word from me, and you and your band of cutthroats there will, in five minutes, be in eternity! Though you can show no mercy to others, mercy shall be shown to you. Away with you—your very presence is pollution!"

"I obey, most reverend dealer in magic," said De Lisle, with a mocking bow and smile, though his face was ghastly with suppressed passion, "but think not, though you are triumphant now, you have conquered Ralph de Lisle. I swear I will yet have threefold vengeance on you, hoary sorcerer, and on this double-dyed traitor beside you!"

With a fierce exclamation Fred sprang forward, and De Lisle would doubtless have been felled to the earth, but the hermit laid his hand on the young man's shoulder, and said sternly:

"I command you not. 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, and I will repay.' Leave this fiend incarnate to a higher Power. His race will soon be run."

"Ha! Say you so, good father?" said De Lisle ironically. "It might be so, but I will send a few of your particular friends before me to announce my coming. I regret leaving such pleasant company, but 'necessity knows no law.' I trust soon to have the pleasure of meeting you both again. Until then!"

He bowed, lifted his hat, and with the same cold, sneering smile on his lip, he turned away. Whispering a few words in the ear of Paul Snowe, whose eyes were fixed as if fascinated on the hermit, he gave his men the order to mount. Ere five minutes had elapsed they were in their saddles and away.

"We must follow their example," said the hermit to Fred. Then turning to the chief he spoke a few words in the Indian language, to which the other answered by a nod, and making a sign that they should follow him, he turned and forced his way through the group of dogged-looking warriors, whose glances toward Fred were anything but friendly.

Fred's horse was led forth, together with the hermit's. The chief himself mounted and gave some order to his followers, upon which some

half dozen sprang into their saddles and the whole party dashed off.

As they reached the summit of the hill Fred paused a moment to look back. Scarcely eight hours had elapsed since he had stood in the same spot, but how different were his feelings! Then he stood on the threshold of death, with his deadly foe on one side and bloodthirsty savages on the other. Now he was safe and free, or at least on the high road to freedom, saved by the same mysterious being who had saved his life before. All the events since his capture had passed so rapidly that he was almost tempted to believe it was but a troubled dream. A glance, however, at his dusky companions soon convinced him of the unpleasant reality, and quickening his pace he descended the hill, and bade a last and reluctant adieu to the Indian village.

Near the spot where Fred had been made captive their savage escort left them, and the preserver and preserved went on their journey alone.

For a time they rode in silence. Both were too deeply absorbed in thought to converse. At length the hermit looked up and said:

"Yours was a narrow escape, my friend. You were indeed literally snatched a brand from the burning."

"And to you I owe it," replied Fred gratefully. "You seem fated to place me under a debt of

gratitude. I will not attempt to thank you for saving me from a doom so dreadful. No words of mine——”

“I want no thanks,” interrupted the hermit. “If you really feel grateful let your gratitude be inward, and manifest itself by actions instead of words. I know the world too well to place much confidence in hollow promises!”

“How did you discover I was a prisoner?” inquired Fred, whose curiosity could no longer be restrained.

“Very easily. I foresaw danger when you started, and followed you.”

“Then you were near me during my journey,” said Fred. “I wonder the savages did not discover you.”

“I was near you at first, but was unable to ride forward as rapidly as your party. However, I followed your trail and reached the village a few hours after, and providentially in time to save your life.”

“It is most wonderful they would surrender a captive at the stake,” said Fred. “Your power, sir, seems to be omnipotent.”

“I had a strong claim on the gratitude of the chief,” said the hermit. “Once, when I found him alone, wounded and almost dying, I had him borne to my dwelling and nursed him until he recovered. Since then he has been anxious to

redeem the promise made at the time, to grant me the first favor I ever asked of him; and as your life chanced to be the first he was forced to grant it. Besides," he added with a smile, "his superstitious followers consider me something more than mortal, and labor under the delusion that in offending me they will draw upon themselves the wrath of the Great Spirit."

"Your power extends over more than superstitious savages," said Fred, "my father, stern and haughty as he is, quails before you as he has never done before any other living man. Would I knew the secret of your mysterious power!"

A shadow passed over the face of the hermit, and when he spoke again his voice was unusually low and solemn:

"Some day, ere long perhaps, you will learn all. Until that time, rest in peace, and believe this mystery is all for the best. I go now to my home on the cliffs, but something tells me we will soon meet again."

"Well, let it be for joy or for sorrow, the meeting will be welcome," replied Fred; "but why should you reside in that lonely spot, why not seek a home with your friends?"

"Friends?" repeated the hermit, almost bitterly; "who in this selfish world deserve that sacred name? No, I have done with trusting

the world; my experience has taught me how much reliance there is to be placed in it. I would be alone with nature—watching the mighty, ever-moaning sea, listening to the wild shrieks of the wind, or gazing upon the blue lightning, I am happy. I never wish to mingle with my fellow men more.”

“Strange, eccentric being,” thought Fred as he gazed on the pale face of his companion, now lit up by enthusiasm. “What strange vicissitudes he must have passed through!”

“What do you think now of my prediction?” said the hermit quietly, after a few moment’s pause.

“Think?” replied Fred, “why, that your prophecy has in a most unpleasantly short time been fulfilled, and I must apologize for ever presuming to doubt its truth.”

“I fear still greater dangers are in store for you,” said the hermit gloomily.

“From what quarter now?” inquired Fred.

“From your mortal enemy, De Lisle. There was something perfectly fiendish in his look as he left us; and it needs no soothsayer to tell he is even now plotting against you.”

“Well, it seems to be a drawn battle,” said Fred with a half smile, “he plotting and you counter-plotting. As for me, I seem like a rudderless craft in the stream of life, drifting whichever

way the current sets. It is useless striving to guard against dangers when we cannot foresee in what shape they may come. So, my dear sir, I shall preserve the even tenor of my way, and place my trust in Providence and *you*."

"Youth is always hopeful and blindly trusting," said the hermit; "but Heaven forbid my presentiments should prove true, for there may be dangers worse than death. Disgrace to you would be a thousandfold worse."

"Disgrace!" exclaimed Fred, almost furiously, while his face flushed; "who dares couple my name with disgrace?"

"De Lisle will endeavor to do so, rest assured," said the hermit; "there—there is no need of looking so fierce about it. Do you imagine there is anything he can do to injure you in the opinion of the world, more especially in that of the Percivals, that he will not do? And, speaking of the Percivals, I presume that is your present destination."

"No," said Fred, "I go there no more. Would to Heaven I had never gone there."

"It would have been better for all parties," said the hermit; "but the past can never be recalled, and you can only endeavor to atone for it by absenting yourself for the future. Edith's love for you has remained firm throughout, and will to the end—for her you need have no fear.

The war will soon be over, and there can be little doubt which side will be victorious. Major Percival's views may change in time, and his fair daughter may yet be your bride. Who can tell what the future may bring forth?"

"Who indeed?" thought Fred, "though I fancy that prediction is altogether too good to prove true."

"And now farewell!" said the hermit, when they emerged from the forest road. "I go to my wild home amid the cliffs, while you go to follow the path of glory. It may be, when we meet again, many things now hidden in darkness shall be brought to light. When in danger, remember you have a friend in the Hermit of the Cliffs."

He turned in a direction opposite to that taken by Fred, and was soon out of sight.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAST RESOLVE.

"There was a laughing devil in his sneer,
That raised emotions both of rage and fear;
And where his frown of hatred darkly fell,
Hope, withering, fled—and Mercy sighed farewell."

—THE CORSAIR.

Months passed away. Hoary winter had shrunk back before smiling spring, and the golden summer days were approaching again. Many exciting events had taken place since the circumstances recorded in the last chapter, for the war was over and America was free.

It was a dark sultry night in June. In the back parlor of an unpretending-looking inn sat two men conversing. They were our old acquaintances Ralph de Lisle and his amiable friend Paul Snowe.

"What is this wonderful plot you have in your wise head now, De Lisle?" inquired the man Paul.

"A plot that, like some great medicines, must either kill or cure," answered De Lisle; "one that makes Edith Percival mine beyond hope of redemption."

"I never knew one of your plans yet that you

were not equally sure of. Take care this does not prove a will-o'-the-wisp like the rest," said the other, with a sneer.

"No, by Heaven!" exclaimed De Lisle, setting his teeth fiercely; "this night Edith Percival shall either be my bride or that of death; this night the crisis of her fate and mine has come."

"Bah! all foolery, all child's play!" said Paul Snowe in his jibing tone. "You lay wonderful plans and see them slip through your fingers when they are in your power. This girl who has made such a fool of you was for a week under the same roof with you, her lover and your mortal foe was likewise within arm's length of you. Well, you let both go, let them give you the slip, and laugh at you and your plans in safety."

"For that I may thank your dainty daughter and that villainous young scoundrel Joe Smith," said De Lisle angrily. "I should have liked to twist her treacherous neck on my return, and would have done so but for you."

"I have no doubt of it," said Paul deliberately filling a glass of brandy; "but you well know you are too completely in my power to play any of your tricks off on me. What would you do if I took a fancy to split some day and let all out?"

"If you would," exclaimed De Lisle, his face

growing absolutely livid with rage as he drew a pistol, "I would——"

"What?" said Paul Snowe, with his deriding smile, as his leader paused.

"Shoot you like a dog!" muttered De Lisle through his clenched teeth.

"Two could play at that game my worthy captain," said the man, carelessly touching a long knife he wore. "If I took a fancy for preaching there would be a slight obstacle in the way of your shooting me—something like this." And Paul made a peculiar motion under his left ear indicative of hanging.

"Villain!" said De Lisle, "there *was* a time when you would not dare to be thus insolent. But boast away, I fear you not; you are too careful of your own precious jugular to risk it by such an experiment. I fancy when Ralph de Lisle swings Paul Snowe will keep him company."

"Perhaps so. Well, it's a comfort to think the world will wag just as merrily when we are gone. There will be few tears shed over our graves—eh, captain?"

"You forget your affectionate daughter," said De Lisle sneeringly.

"Elva? She will be better without me; but for her sake I will avoid Jack Ketch as long as possible. But to change the subject, which is

getting rather personal when you talk of hanging, how do you propose to abduct Miss Percival?"

"I shall not abduct her, my good friend; she must come with me of her own free will or not at all."

"Faith! You're getting mighty particular. I've seen the time you weren't so choice, and was glad to get her by hook or by crook."

"Yes, but that time has passed, and my proud Lady Edith shall sue to me now as I have heretofore done to her. Love and hatred, worthy Paul, are nearly akin. Next to myself I loved that girl better than anything on earth. Well, she jilted me for this dashing rebel—or patriot I suppose I should say, since they have triumphed—and I hate her now with an intensity far surpassing any love I ever felt for her. Now I would, as far as love is concerned, a thousand times rather marry your pretty daughter Elva than her."

"Much obliged for the honor," said Paul dryly. "But, in the name of my 'pretty daughter Elva,' I beg respectfully to decline the illustrious alliance."

De Lisle smiled scornfully, but without noticing his words went on:

"Affection, therefore, you see, has nothing to do with my wish to make Edith Percival my

wife. Hatred and revenge are my sole motives. She loathes the very sight of me, I know, and there is no other means by which I can punish her for it so well. Her lover, too—Master Fred—will feel it more than anything else I could possibly do. Therefore, these are my reasons for wishing to marry Edith.”

“I didn’t ask you for your reasons,” said Paul. “I don’t take so much interest in either of you. You say you are going to make her marry you. Now, how are you going to do it?”

“Listen!” said his friend, with a sardonic smile. “I have learned that my quondam lady-love has taken a fancy to a sick girl in the neighborhood and visits her very often. A brother of the invalid, a child of nine, goes for her when wanted. This little fellow I told to meet me to-night at a place I appointed, but I have not yet told him what I want. I think I can manage to induce him to bring Edith out. I will meet her, urge her to fly with me, and if she persists in refusing——”

“Well, and if she does?” said the man looking up.

“I will stab her to the heart!” exclaimed De Lisle, in a fierce, hoarse whisper, while his eyes glittered with a demoniacal light.

Paul Snowe drew back involuntarily at the

strange, wild expression on his companion's face. With a look of horror he exclaimed:

"No, no! Devil as you are, you would not murder an unoffending girl!"

"Ha! ha! Paul Snowe turned preacher!" mocked De Lisle. "When was it your conscience became so tender, honest Paul—since the night your Spanish knife let the moonlight through Dandy Dan's backbone for calling you a liar—eh?"

"Perdition seize you! Hush!" exclaimed Paul, growing pale. "I meant not to dissuade you from it; but it will be discovered, and then we will *swing*, you know."

"Well, it's swing with us any way, sooner or later. One may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, Paul," said De Lisle recklessly.

"To be sure," said Paul, turning uneasily in his chair and draining another glass of brandy. "But where's the use of being so desperate? You ought to take precautions."

"So I have, my honest friend. If it does come to the worst, I think I have arranged matters in such a manner that all the blame will fall on the shoulders of that meddler, Fred Stanley."

"Ha! You have—in what way?"

"This dagger belongs to him; I saw his name engraved on it, and thinking it might be useful to me, I took charge of it. About three hours

ago I saw him parting with Major Percival, and the major foaming and scolding like an enraged washerwoman. Shortly after he mounted his horse, and left the village in hot haste. Now, if the major's daughter is found mur—well, you know what I mean—to-morrow morning, with *his* dagger somewhere near, that circumstance, taken in connection with his quarrel with the major and subsequent flight from the village, will without doubt place the worthy youth's neck in a tight place, and convince the world generally, and his admirers particularly, that, after all his escapes, he was born to be hanged in the end."

There was a wicked and most sinister smile on De Lisle's lips, a glittering light in his evil eyes that involuntarily made Paul Snowe, hardened in crime though he was, draw back in horror. There was something so fearfully cold-blooded in the manner in which he unfolded his diabolical plot, that his listener placed his hand on the hilt of his knife, and looked for a moment into De Lisle's gleaming eyes in silence.

"Well, what do you think of it?" demanded De Lisle at length.

"Think!" repeated Paul; "why, that if there ever was a fiend incarnate on earth you are one!"

"Ha, ha! Well, no matter for that. Do you not think my plan a safe one?"

"I neither know nor care, Ralph de Lisle. If

you are safe yourself, all right; if you are *not* safe, all right likewise. I will have nothing to do with your diabolical plans; therefore, as I said before, I neither know nor care whether you are safe or not."

"Insolent villain!" exclaimed De Lisle, springing fiercely to his feet, "you shall repent this."

"Hands off, De Lisle!" said Paul boldly confronting him. "I am not afraid of you. Commit your own murders for the future, I will have no more to do with such a cold-blooded assassin."

For a moment De Lisle glared upon him like a wild beast, but the bold eye of Paul Snowe quailed not beneath his burning gaze. Seeing how little he was feared De Lisle changed his tactics, and throwing himself back in his chair he said, with a forced laugh:

"Well, we won't quarrel, Paul; we have been friends too long to part in anger, and especially about such a trifle."

"I never was a friend of yours, Captain de Lisle," said Paul doggedly. "Villainy bound us together; but the link of crime is very different from that of friendship."

"Have it your own way," said De Lisle, with affected carelessness, as he replaced the dagger within his vest. "And now I see by yonder time-piece that 'tis time I was keeping my appointment

with little nine-year-old. You'll wait for me here, of course?"

"No, I won't!" was the short, sharp, and decisive reply. "I have waited for you too long, as I may yet find out to my cost. You and I part to-night, De Lisle," continued Paul Snowe, rising and taking his hat. "I intend leaving the country as soon as possible, and if you wish to avoid the hangman you will follow my example, and let Edith Percival alone. Don't turn so white about the gills, man, I won't peach. But you know, however long the fox may run he'll be caught by the tail at last. So, as we are parting, I'll take a last glass with you in memory of old times. Here's wishing you long life and an escape from the halter."

"I'll drink no such toast," said De Lisle, biting his lips to keep down his increasing anger. "Here's to the bright eyes of your daughter Elva."

"So be it then," said Paul, refilling his glass; "and on those same bright eyes you will never look again, my susceptible friend. Good night, De Lisle, and luck be with you."

He turned and quitted the room. De Lisle looked after him with an evil smile as he muttered:

"Say you so, worthy Paul? That remains to be seen. And now for the drama of the eve-

ning. Shall it be a tragedy or a farce? Well, ere midnight I will know."

He drank deeply as if to nerve himself for what was approaching, and then, muffling himself in his cloak and drawing his hat down over his brow, he quitted the obscure inn and disappeared in the gloomy night.

CHAPTER X.

THE OLD HOUSE ON THE BLUFF.

"A willing messenger—Crime's ready tool—
A thing of flesh and blood that may be bought
And sold like vilest merchandise."

The sky was dark and overcast with storm-threatening clouds. The moon struggled feebly on her way, shedding a sickly light over the earth. The wind had been rising all the evening, and now blew chill and raw, accompanied by a light drizzle. Lights were twinkling here and there through the village as De Lisle passed along, but there were few abroad, a circumstance he rejoiced at lest he should be discovered. Those who did meet him as they hurried homeward, paused to stare in surprise at the tall, dark, muffled figure which strode along as though gifted with the famous seven-league boots.

Faster and faster he walked, for, half mad with excitement, he strove to lose memory in the rapid motion. His head, hot and throbbing, felt as though it would burst. He paused for a moment, and leaning against a tree, took off his hat that the cool breeze might relieve him. His long, dark locks streamed wildly in the wind behind him, and his heart throbbed so loudly that every

pulsation sounded like the stroke of a sledge-hammer. His hands were red with blood, his soul dark with crime; but never had he meditated so dreadful a murder as weighed on his heart to-night. The shadows, as they flitted by, looked to his heated imagination like specters rising from the grave to warn him back.

The village clock struck nine. He started at the sound, and, unable to remain longer inactive, started on more rapidly than before. As he walked he suddenly lifted his head and beheld the churchyard before him. To reach the place where the boy was to meet him he must pass it. The tombstones gleamed white and ghastly in the dim light. How they seemed to glare upon him with their cold, pale eyes!

He shuddered and hurried on faster than ever. His rapid walking soon brought him to the place of rendezvous; it was an old deserted house on the black hillside, known as the Barn on the Bluff. It had been untenanted for many a day, and was only used as a shelter for sheep on stormy nights. No other house was near it on any side. It stood alone, black, grim, and dismal, a fit place for the dark scene it was to witness that night.

A boy of about nine, a vacant-eyed, stupid-faced urchin, stood shivering beside one of the broken windows, and endeavoring to peer out

into the gloom. Hearing approaching footsteps he started from his corner, and met De Lisle in the doorway.

"If you'd stayed much longer I wouldn't 'a' waited," said the boy rather sullenly. "Why didn't you come sooner?"

"It's time enough," said De Lisle. "Do you think you'll find Miss Percival at home now?"

"Be sure I will," replied the boy. "They've a party to-night and she'll be sure to be there."

"A party!" muttered De Lisle; "that defeats all my plans. Why didn't you tell me this before, you young rascal. She won't come with you if they have a party."

"Yes she will, too," said the boy. "She did it afore, and she told our Harriet any time she wanted her she'd come, and no bother about it."

"Well, will you go and tell her your sister is dying, or any other lie that you think will be likely to bring her here. See, I will give you this gold guinea now, and a dozen when you come back."

"Will you, though?" exclaimed the boy, his eyes sparkling with delight.

"Yes, if you bring her here alone. Mind, don't tell her there is a man waiting for her here. You have to pass this bluff on your way home, have you not?"

"Yes; but there's another shorter way."

"Oh, well, don't mind the shorter way. Bring her here alone, mind, alone. Do you think there is any danger of her being accompanied by any one?"

"No, I guess not; she often came with me alone to see Harriet as late as this."

"Very well then; go now and don't be long. Remember, if you bring Miss Percival here alone, you shall have my purse upon your return."

"All right," answered the boy, touching his cap as he quitted the old house and bounded down the hill.

Folding his arms across his breast and drawing his cloak closer around him, De Lisle leaned against the broken doorway and strove to still the wild tumult within, and think. Think! How could he think with heart and brain burning and throbbing with such a blinding intensity of pain. His face was deadly pale, his eyes inflamed and bloodshot, his lips dry and parched. A horror, nameless and hitherto unfelt, was stealing over him. It was as if some dread calamity were hovering over his own head.

All was profoundly still. The lights in the village below were going out one by one, as the simple villagers retired to rest, little dreaming of him who leaned silent and alone in the old house with such a tumultuously throbbing heart. The wind wailed dirgelike through the trees, and at

intervals the ominous croak of a raven—that evil bird of night—as it flew past would break upon his ear, startling him like a galvanic shock.

“Would this night were over!” he muttered, taking off his hat, and shaking back his black locks. “Am I turning coward that I quake thus at every sound? Ralph de Lisle, courage man! ’Tis but a girl more or less in the world, and there is no one to know it.”

No one to know it! A stray gleam of moonlight breaking through the clouds fell on his face white as that of the dead, but lighted up with such intensely burning eyes. No one to know it! A still, small voice, deep down in his heart, and silent for many a year, rang out with one word, clear and distinct. A host of memories, memories of his almost forgotten childhood, rushed back to his mind. Again he felt his mother’s gentle hand straying amid his hair; her soft voice whispering, as she passed from earth: “Love and fear God, my son, and meet me in heaven.” How reproachfully her loving eyes rose before him now. Again in fancy he wandered hand in hand with Edith, as he had often done in childhood, or lay on the grass at her feet, while she sang for him the sweet “Evening Hymn,” and he thought the sky not half so blue and beautiful as her eyes. Words he had long forgotten came again to his mind; the simple,

earnest prayer he had said in his boyhood, night and morning, like some wandering strain of music rose to his lips. It was the last struggle between good and evil in his heart. His better nature seemed for a moment to prevail. He turned to quit the old house, when the image of Fred Stanley arose before him. The struggle was past, he stayed. His good angel covered her bright face and wept, and Ralph de Lisle was forever lost.

CHAPTER XI.

CAUGHT IN THE SNARE.

"'Tis done! I saw it in my dreams—
No more with hope the future beams.

My days of happiness are few:
Chilled by Misfortune's wintry blast,
My dawn of life is overcast;
Love, hope, and joy alike adieu;
Would I could add remembrance, too!"

—BYRON.

Percival Hall was all aglow with light and radiance, music and mirth, feasting and festivity. The lofty rooms were crowded with the numerous friends of the family for the last time, for Major Percival had announced his intention of departing for England in a few weeks, to reside there permanently.

Weary with dancing, Edith had quitted the ballroom and sought refuge in the conservatory. The gay sounds of music and dancing came to her ear softened and mellowed by the distance.

Seating herself in a shadowy corner, she leaned her head upon her hand, while her thoughts wandered far away. She felt sad and out of spirits and in no mood to join the gay revelers. She was about to leave her home for the shores of "Merry England," to leave many

whom she loved and who loved her, behind. She thought of Fred, but no longer with hope. At her father's command they parted forever. Unable longer to resist the temptation, he had sought the village and they had one interview. The major discovered it, and a few hours before they had parted after an exceedingly stormy interview, and she had been sternly forbidden ever to see or speak to him again.

Therefore Edith sat sad and silent, with tears slowly filling her deep-blue eyes, and falling unheeded on her white hands. Tears for him, tears for herself, and a weight heavy and oppressive on her heart.

The entrance of a servant roused her from her sad reverie. The girl paused as she approached her, and Edith looked up inquiringly:

"If you please, miss, little Eddy Dillon's out here. He says his sister Harriet sent him with a message for you."

"Dear little Harriet! I hope she is not worse. Where is he, Betty? I must see him immediately," said Edith, forgetting her own sorrows to listen to those of others.

"Down here at the hall door, miss," said Betty. And Edith flew past her and ran down to the hall door where stood little Eddy, cap in hand.

"Oh, Eddy! How is Harriet?" exclaimed Edith, breathlessly.

"A great deal better—I mean worse, Miss Edith," said Eddy; "don't expect she'll live till to-morrow, nohow."

"Is it possible? Poor little Harriet! Why didn't you come for me before?" said Edith.

"Cause I was busy," said Eddy scratching his head as he composedly uttered the lie. "But she wants to see you now if you're agreeable."

"Certainly I'll go. Betty, bring me my hood and mantle," said Edith promptly.

"Oh, Miss Edith! I wouldn't go to-night if I was you. It's going to rain I'm afraid, and the company——"

"Betty, you mustn't talk so. Do you think any such selfish consideration would make me refuse the dear child's dying request? Bring me my hood and cloak immediately."

Betty disappeared to obey her, and turning to Eddy, Edith began inquiring so eagerly about this sudden dangerous turn in his sister's illness, that the good youth, not having a stock of lies manufactured for the occasion, got quite bewildered. Betty's reappearance with the desired articles relieved him from his dilemma, as she threw the cloak over Edith's shoulders and tied on her hood.

"Hadn't you better let me or one of the others go with you?" said Betty. "It's powerful lonesome going along alone."

"No, thank you; I'll do very well. Eddy and I have often gone alone on the same errand to see poor Harriet."

"What will I say if any one asks for you, miss?" called Betty after her.

"You may tell mamma where I have gone; and if any one else asks you refer them to her. Come, Eddy, I am all ready."

They went down the steps together and started at a rapid walk. The clouds were slowly breaking away and the moon rode in silvery radiance through the star-studded dome. The cool night breeze brought a bright flush to Edith's pale cheek and a clearer light to her blue eyes, as she tripped lightly along thinking of "dear little Harriet," and almost envying her for being freed from earth so soon. Master Eddy, too, was thinking—a very unusual thing for him by the way—and which never occurred save on an unusual occurrence like the present. He was wondering what the tall, dark man could want with her, and whether he had acted quite right in deceiving her as he had done. Unable to solve this knotty problem, he placed his hand in his pocket where it encountered and closed upon a guinea, which, in a wonderfully short space of time removed all his scruples, just as it would those of an older person. The recollection of the twelve he was to get on his return clinched the argu-

ment, and Master Eddy lifted his head and walked along in the proud consciousness of having discharged his duty as a man should. Having heard the villagers talk over the story of Miss Edith's rebel lover, he concluded this must be he come to hold a clandestine interview with her.

"Why are you taking this roundabout way?" asked Edith, as her companion turned in the direction of the bluff. "The other path is much shorter."

"Yes, I know it; but the other road's muddy; 'tain't so good as this," said Eddy, rather at a loss for a suitable lie. "This ain't much longer either."

"Oh, very well!" said Edith; "only hurry, I am so anxious to see Harriet."

Both walked on rapidly and in silence until they reached the dark bluff.

"Where are you going?" asked Edith, as Eddy began to ascend.

"I left something up in the old barn I must go after. Come with me, I don't like to go alone."

Unconscious and unsuspecting, Edith followed him up the steep hillside. The bright moonlight shone full upon the deserted barn, and showed it in all its dreary loneliness.

"What a dismal place!" thought Edith; "it

looks wilder and drearier to-night than I ever remember to have seen it before. How ghastly those moldering walls look in the cold moonlight!"

Within the shadow of those walls, how little did she dream that he whom she dreaded most on earth stood watching her. Rapidly she followed her young guide, whose steps were quickened by the recollection of the reward promised on his return.

A tall, dark figure muffled in a cloak stepped from within the shadow of the doorway, and approached them. Something in his height and air reminded her of Fred, and filled with the idea that he had again sought her to bid her a final adieu she sprang forward, exclaiming breathlessly:

"Fred! Fred! Can this be you?"

He raised his hand, and made a motion for her to be silent. Then, slipping the promised reward into the boy's hand, he whispered sternly:

"Go!"

"Oh, Fred! This is very rash," said Edith, as the boy bounded down the hillside and disappeared. "What would papa say if he knew of this?"

"Hist!" said De Lisle, disguising his voice in a hurried whisper; "come in here."

He drew her arm within his, and half bewil-

dered by this sudden meeting, she scarcely realized his meaning until she stood with him in the old deserted house. He released her arm and stood between her and the door, his hat still hiding his face, so tall, so still, so motionless that he looked like some dark statue.

"Fred, is this you?" said Edith, a wild thrill of fear shooting through her heart at his strange silence. The long cloak that muffled him fell off, he slowly raised his hat, and she beheld the pale, fierce face and intensely burning eyes of her dreaded foe, Ralph de Lisle.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CATASTROPHE.

"Murder most foul—as in the best it is—
But this most foul, strange, and unnatural."

SHAKESPEARE.

Stunned, bewildered, giddy, the wild shriek of mortal fear that quivered on the lips of Edith died away, as she met those fierce dark eyes she dreaded most on earth fixed upon her with such a fiery, serpentlike gaze.

She grew dizzy and gasped for breath, for there was a look more of a demon than of a man on the face before her. Alone with him, in that deserted house, too far from the village for her cries to reach human ears, nothing but Heaven could save her now. All the dangers of her appalling situation burst upon her at once. A dimness stole over her eyes, the sound of many waters was in her ears, her heart throbbed like the muffled beating of a drum, and she would have fallen had she not grasped the wall for support.

"I see you have not forgotten me, Edith," were his first words, spoken with cold sarcasm. "When last we parted you had decidedly the advantage of me, now the tables have turned, and Edith Percival is again in my power."

She strove to speak, but though her lips moved, she could not articulate a word.

"You mistook me for Fred," he went on in the same mocking tone; "'tis a wondrous pity you were disappointed. You need never call on him again. This night is the crisis of both our lives. For what purpose do you think I have had you brought here?"

"I know not," said Edith, speaking in a voice yet faint from terror.

"Listen then: this night you must either consent to be my bride, or you will never live to see the sun rise again!"

His face wore the look of a fiend, his glittering eyes were fixed on her face; his voice sounded low, hoarse, and unnatural in that dreary room.

Her lips parted, her eyes dilated with horror, her face was deadly white, but no cry escaped her. Her very heart seemed for a moment to stand still at his appalling words, and then—the courage that had never been hers was granted her in that dreadful moment. In her awful peril, fear and horror alike passed away, and a feeling of intense loathing and lofty scorn for him who stood before her took its place. Drawing herself up to her full height, and fixing her large blue eyes full on his face, she said, in a voice whose very calmness startled even herself:

"My life you may take, for it is in your power; but I would die a thousand deaths sooner than be bride or ought of thine!"

Her fearless words and undaunted manner were so unexpected that he started back apace, and stood regarding her in silent wonder. It was but for a moment, and the fiend within his heart was aroused into fury tenfold greater than before.

"And you dare defy me thus!" he said, setting his teeth hard together. "Beware! Your life hangs but by a thread."

"I know it; but death is preferable to being the wife of a demon incarnate such as you!"

His face grew livid with diabolical passion, and he grasped her by the arm so fiercely that she could scarcely repress a cry of pain.

"Consent to be my wife, or by all the fiends in flames this shall enter your heart!" he said, as he brandished the gleaming dagger before her eyes.

"Ralph de Lisle, lay not the weight of this dreadful crime on your soul, I conjure you!" exclaimed Edith, laying her small white hand on his arm and looking up in his face with her earnest eyes; "by the memory of the past, when you were young and guiltless, I implore you to spare my life! Think of the remorse you will endure for

this awful crime in days to come. Oh, Ralph, Ralph, by the love you bore for me once, commit not the fearful sin! Think of the eternal woe pronounced against the murderer hereafter, and have mercy upon yourself!"

The thrilling, the intense solemnity of her tone awed even his heart of stone. Like some wandering strain of music it broke upon his ear, and for a moment he paused, appalled at the magnitude of the crime he was about to commit. But his evil mentor whispered in his ear: "It is too late to retreat," and the chord she had touched no longer vibrated.

"You prate in vain!" he exclaimed; "once again I ask you, will you be my wife?"

"Never—never!"

He paused, as if to work his feelings up to the most intense pitch of maddening excitement. His whole frame quivered and his ghastly face was convulsed by rage.

"For the last time I ask you, Edith Percival," he said in a voice hoarse and choked, "will you marry me or die?"

"I will die!"

Her words fell clear and distinct in the deep silence of the lonely night. Foaming with rage he drew the slender, glittering knife, and plunged it up to the hilt in her side!

The hot blood spurted up in his face. With one wild cry of mortal agony she fell to the ground.

De Lisle stood above her, ghastly and paralyzed by the awful deed. With one last effort, she rose on her elbow, fixed her dying eyes on his face and drew out the dagger. A torrent of blood flowed over her snowy hands, and dyed with crimson the floor around. Her white lips parted, but no sound came forth, her eyes grew glazed and sightless, and she fell back, stiff and cold and lifeless.

And there, in the light of the solemn stars, in the lonely silence of the night, the fearful tragedy had been enacted. The cold glare of the moonlight streaming through the broken casement fell softly and pitiingly on the still form that lay on the ground. The golden hair fell over her face, but the wild, despairing eyes seemed still fixed on the face of her murderer, as he stood like one turned to stone above her. Her white festal garments were red with blood, and one little hand still held the dagger, dyed with the same dreadful hue.

De Lisle stood rooted to the ground, feeling as though he neither lived nor breathed. Everything danced red and fiery before his eyes, his brain and heart seemed rending in twain.

Heaven of heavens! How those dying, despairing eyes seemed glaring upon him!

Maddened, frenzied, crazed, he turned to rush from the building. His foot struck against something and he stumbled. He glanced down, and saw it was the fatal dagger. With a fearful oath he hurled it over the craggy bluff, and fled out into the open air.

He paused for a moment and pressed his hands heavily to his burning temples that throbbed madly beneath his fingers. His eyes were like burning coals, his lips were hot and parched, and his hands trembled as though he were stricken with the palsy. The night wind seemed to shriek in his ear, "Murderer." Ringing—ringing through heart and brain was that last dying cry, until he stopped his ears in agonized horror.

In all that tempest of remorse and terror arose before him the oft-spoken words, "What next?"

What should he do? Whither should he go? His first impulse was to rush from that dreadful spot, and fly—fly far from the world, far from his fellow men, and far from himself. One other idea filled his mind: it was to destroy the evidence of his crime, to burn the old house and what it contained. He could not endure to see it standing there, so dark and ghastly, seeming to mock him in his agony of remorse. There

was a pile of loose brushwood near. He set it on fire, and paused to gaze, as

——“fierce and high
The death-pile blazed unto the sky.”

How red and fiery the flames looked? Were they, too, tinged with blood.

He knew the place would soon be surrounded, and he dare not pause to see his dreadful work accomplished. Like one pursued by a demon he fled, and paused not until he had gained the village. There was no one astir; all were buried in peaceful repose, unconscious of the awful crime that had just been committed. How the murderer envied them as he flew past.

He paused not until he had gained his own room and locked himself in. A flask of brandy stood on the table. Glass after glass of the fiery liquid he drained, to drown recollection; but all in vain, all in vain! Those dying eyes—that despairing cry—that last imploring gaze, were before him still; and he paced up and down the room like a maniac, not daring to pause one moment in his rapid walk.

“Fire! Fire!”

The cry ran through the streets, and roused him into action. All was bustle and confusion. Men were rushing through the streets toward the scene of the tragedy. He could not endure

this dreadful inaction longer. Opening the door he left the inn, and mingling with the crowd rushed toward the burning house.

Amid all that crowd no one strove so zealously to extinguish the flames as he. In the wild excitement there was no time to think, and he worked as though his very life depended on it. All their efforts were, however, vain; higher and higher rose the flames, rearing their heads, red and fiery, into heaven, until De Lisle almost fancied they were crying for vengeance on him.

Suddenly a bright sheet of flame shot into the cloudless sky—the next moment there was a loud crash, as the whole building fell, a mass of fiery ruins, to the ground.

De Lisle felt as though the sight was leaving his eyes, as he witnessed that last act in the fearful tragedy of the night. The people, wondering how the fire could have originated, were hurrying to their homes. He dared not venture to go with them; for in his excitement he fancied every one could read “murderer” in his face. He turned and plunged into the dark pine woods, scarcely knowing whither he went, only striving to escape from himself and his haunting remorse. He could hear that cry as the wind wailed like a lost spirit through the trees, he could see those imploring eyes still before him, wherever he went. He put his hand over his eyes to shut

them out, but all in vain, they were still before him, so mournful, so beseeching, so sadly reproachful.

"Oh, that this night were over!" he said, wiping the perspiration from his heated brow. "What have I done that I should be tortured thus? Oh, for the waters of Lethe, to drown maddening memory! Shall I never again know peace—can I never escape from myself?"

Through the dim woods he paced until morning. The red sunlight gilded with golden glory the green tree tops, and the murderer shrank from its bright gaze like the guilty thing that he was. He hurried to his rooms, drained glass after glass of brandy, and then flung himself on his bed to lose the recollection of what he had done in feverish sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEXT MORNING.

"And over all there hung a baleful gloom—
The step stole fearful through each shadowy room.
Dark, sumptuous, solemn as some Eastern pile
Where mutes keep watch—a home without a smile."

BULWER.

The red light of coming morn dispersed the revelers from Percival Hall. One by one they departed, until where lately all was music and mirth profound silence reigned.

And father and mother, brother and sister, all slept, little dreaming of the fate of her they loved. During the night, when the gay hours flitted by on "rosy wings," no presentiment of what was passing in the lonely house on the bluff arose before them to mar their festivity. And now, all unconscious of her absence or her dreadful fate, they slept peacefully.

"Where is Edith?" asked Major Percival, as the family assembled a few hours after around the breakfast table.

"Don't know, I'm sure," replied Nell, to whom the question was addressed; "I haven't seen her since early last night."

"She was not among the dancers during the morning," remarked Gus; "I missed her and heard several wondering at her absence."

"Strange," said the major, frowning slightly. "What must our guests have thought? Edith has acted very strangely of late."

"Perhaps she is ill," said Mrs. Percival anxiously. "Tell one of the servants, Ellen, to go up to her room and see."

"I'll go myself," said Nell, rising and hurriedly leaving the room.

In a few moments she reappeared, and with a look of alarm announced that Edith was not in her room and that her bed had not been slept in at all that night.

"Where can she be?" said Mrs. Percival, now thoroughly alarmed. "Something must have happened."

"Ring the bell and see if any of the servants know," said the major, more angry than frightened.

Nell obeyed, and in a moment Betty made her appearance.

"Have you seen Miss Edith this morning?" demanded her master as she entered.

"This morning? No, sir."

"Do you know where she is?" said the major, for the first time beginning to feel slightly alarmed.

"Yes, sir; little Eddy Dillon came here for her last night, saying his sister Harriet was dying

and wished to see her. She went with him, and bade me tell you, ma'am, but I found no chance."

"Oh, then she's safe enough, I suppose," said the major, while Mrs. Percival drew a long breath, as though relieved.

At this moment Nugent sauntered carelessly in.

"Well, good folks, have you heard the news?" he asked, throwing himself indolently on a lounge.

"No, what news?" said Nell.

"Why, the old barn on the bluff was burned down last night," said Nugent.

"Burned down! It must have been the work of an incendiary then," said his father.

"Doubtless it was, though I cannot see what could have been the object for which it was done," replied his son.

"Some mischievously inclined person, who wished to rouse the villagers," suggested Gus.

"Very likely; 'twas fit for nothing but a bon-fire. Where's Edith?"

"At the Widow Dillon's."

"The Widow Dillon's! Why, she hasn't been there since yesterday morning."

"What!"

"She has not been there since yesterday morning," said Nugent decidedly; "I was going past there about half an hour ago, and Mrs. Dillon

called me in to see her little girl. Harriet begged me to tell Edith to come to her immediately, and Mrs. Dillon said she had been longing for her since she had been there yesterday morning."

"What can be the meaning of all this?" said the major, rising hurriedly, while Mrs. Percival grew pale with terror. "Her son came here for Edith last night and they both departed together."

"She must have left him then, sir," said Nugent, "for she certainly did not accompany him home. He was in the cottage while I was there, and made no mention of her having started with him; neither did the widow allude to her having sent for Edith at all. And now I recollect, she said she would have sent for her last night, but on account of the ball she thought she would not trouble her."

"Oh, Major Percival, something dreadful has happened," said Mrs. Percival, rising in great agitation. "I feel it! I know it! She has been carried off again and we shall never see her more!"

"Nonsense, Mrs. Percival! She is doubtless somewhere in the village," said the major, concealing his own alarm. "I will go in search of her."

"Let me accompany you," said Nugent, spring-

ing up; for the many dangers Edith had recently escaped made them doubly anxious.

Both quitted the house together and walked rapidly in the direction of the village.

"I fear there may be danger, father," said Nugent uneasily; "the whole affair seems rather mysterious."

"Heaven forbid!" said his father hurriedly; "but we must see this boy with whom she departed, and learn from him what has happened."

They walked on in silence until they reached the widow's humble cottage. Mrs. Dillon met them in the doorway, looked alarmed and excited.

"Oh, Major Percival, I'm so glad to see you! Just look here," and the widow displayed a purse filled with bright gold guineas.

"Why, Mrs. Dillon, what piece of good fortune is this you have met with? You haven't robbed a bank, I hope," said young Percival.

"No, indeed, Mr. Nugent," said the widow anxiously. "'Twas he brought this home." And she pointed to where sat her hopeful son and heir, with his finger in his mouth, looking doggedly on the ground.

"Eddy; why, man alive, where did you get all this money?" said Nugent, giving him a shake. "Look up, sir. Have you turned highwayman?"

The boy sat in sulky silence.

"I'm terribly afear'd he stole it," said the widow, in evident distress; "he won't tell where he got it, and I know he never came honestly by it."

"This is serious," said the major, and must be seen to. "See here, my fine fellow," he said sternly, "where did you get this money? Have you stolen it?"

"No, I didn't steal it," said the boy sullenly.

"Where did you get it then? Answer me, or I'll have you committed to prison," said the major with increasing sternness in order to intimidate him.

Eddy looked up, and seeing the inflexible look on the face bending over him, burst into tears.

"Come, my little man, don't cry," said Nugent, patting him on the head; "tell the truth and nothing shall be done to you. Where did you get it?"

"The man gave it to me," sobbed Eddy.

"What man?" inquired Percival.

"The man wot told me to bring Miss Edith to the bluff last night."

"What!" exclaimed the major, catching him so fiercely by the arm that the boy uttered a cry of pain.

"Father, be calm," said Nugent, though his own face grew deadly pale, "we must hear all the particulars, and if you frighten him so he will

not speak. Begin now at the first, Eddy. Who was this man?"

"I don't know, he didn't tell me his name," replied Eddy.

"Can you describe him? What did he look like?"

"He was tall and dark, with black hair and whiskers, and wore a long black cloak. I couldn't see his face 'cause his hat was pulled away down."

"When did you meet him first?"

"Yes'day evening. He asked me if Miss Edith didn't visit Harriet, an' I said yes; and then he told me to meet him on the bluff at nine o'clock, and that he would pay me well."

"Did you go?" asked Nugent, growing more and more excited.

"Yes, I went and waited for him in the old barn. He came and told me to go up to the Hall, and say Harriet wanted Miss Edith—and then bring her to him and he'd pay me—I——"

The boy paused, and glanced in terror at the agitated face of the major.

"Go on," said Nugent hoarsely.

"I'm afraid," said the boy, again beginning to cry.

"Go on, go on, go on!" said the younger man impatiently; "no one shall touch you. Did you obey?"

"Yes. I went up to the ball and Miss Edith came with me. She ran forward when she saw the man, and called him Fred, and he gave me this money and told me to go, and as I ran down hill, I heard her say: 'Oh, Fred, this is very rash!' and then she went with him into the old house."

Father and son gazed into each other's faces, pale with undefined terror.

"Well, what else?" said Nugent, almost giddy with strange apprehension.

"Then I come home," went on the boy reluctantly; "but I wanted to hear who he was, and what he was going to do. So I came back and stood where I could see them without they seeing me. I couldn't see his face 'cause he had his back turned, but I could hear them talking. He asked her to go with him and marry him, or something, and she said she wouldn't, and then——" Again the boy paused, and covered his face with a shudder.

"Well, and then," said Nugent, in a voice that sounded husky and unnatural.

"He got awfully angry, and took out a long knife; and I got frightened and ran away," said the boy, trembling at the recollection.

Nugent paused for a moment to master the emotions that threatened to unman him. Then, with an effort at calmness, he said:

"And what followed next?"

"I went home and went into bed," continued Eddy, "until I heard them singing out 'fire,' and then I got up and went to the bluff, and the barn was burning. I saw the man in the crowd but I was afraid to speak to him, he seemed so wild-like. When the barn was all burned down the people went away, and I saw him go off into the woods, and that's all I know."

"Merciful Heaven!" exclaimed Nugent, reeling back as though stunned by a heavy blow, "Edith is murdered!"

"And Fred Stanley is her murderer," said the major, in a voice so deep and unearthly that it seemed to issue from the jaws of death.

"It cannot be! It cannot be! It is monstrous! Impossible! Absurd!" exclaimed Nugent, in wild excitement. "Fred Stanley could never be an assassin!"

"I tell you he has murdered her," said his father, in a tone of concentrated fierceness; "and by the heaven above us his life shall pay for hers. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life!" he cried, rushing madly from the house.

Nugent followed, and feeling the necessity for calmness and firmness, in the dreadful crisis, he laid his hand on his arm and arrested his flying steps.

"Father, father! Be calm, be calm for Heaven's sake! Think of my mother, if she sees you thus and hears this news, the shock will kill her. For her sake compose yourself and be calm."

"Calm, sir! Dare you talk of calmness when my daughter has been foully assassinated? Oh, Edith! My child, my child! I will not think of mourning for thee until I have had vengeance on thy murderer!"

"Father, it is impossible that Fred Stanley has been guilty of this dreadful deed. I will never believe it!" cried Percival excitedly. "A nobler heart never beat within the breast of man than his."

"Who else is there to have done such an act?" said the major passionately; "did we not part in anger a few hours before? I tell you there was murder in his flashing eyes as I watched him ride away. You heard how it occurred. He urged her to fly with him. She, dreading my anger, refused, and no doubt maddened by her resistance he slew her on the spot. Oh, my daughter, my daughter, why was I not near to save you from so dreadful a fate!"

He wrung his hands and groaned aloud in bitter anguish.

"But the villain shall meet his doom," he again exclaimed, with the old fierceness flashing in his eyes; "this very day shall he be arrested!"

They walked on in silence until they reached the foot of the bluff.

"Let us visit the scene of the tragedy," said Nugent, as they paused for a moment to contemplate the heap of black, smoking ruins.

They turned to ascend. Scarcely had they gone a dozen steps, when the major's eye fell on something bright gleaming among the rocks. He stooped to pick it up and started back with a cry of horror.

It was the fatal dagger, red with still undried blood. As he turned it over, his eye fell on the name engraven on the handle—Frederic Stanley.

"Just Heaven, how wonderful is thy retribution!" he exclaimed, as he handed the knife to his son. "With this fatal blade the deed was done, and the murderer's name is on it. In the excitement of the moment he has cast it away and forgot it."

Pale with horror Nugent examined it. He had often seen the dagger with Fred. It had been given him by his father in his boyhood and was prized as his gift. To doubt his guilt longer seemed out of the question, and yet how could he believe him guilty? Fred Stanley, so brave, so generous, so noble-hearted, guilty of so dreadful a crime. Oh, never, never! The thought was too unnatural to be entertained.

They stood at length, gazing with feelings impossible to describe on the smoldering remains of the fire. There Edith had been slain and her body had perished amid the flames.

It was with very different feelings they stood gazing upon the charred and smoking ruins. In Major Percival's breast, above every other feeling, was the fierce, burning desire for vengeance. He could scarcely think of sorrow, so intense was his desire for revenge; it seemed an injustice to her memory to allow her murderer one moment longer to burden the earth. Hanging seemed a thousand times too good for him, and he would have given worlds to see him broken on the wheel, tortured on the rack, or roasted at a slow fire for the crime he had committed.

In Nugent's heart, horror for his sister's dreadful fate, a feeling of remorse that he had not been near to save her, were mingled with agonizing doubts, whether or not to believe Fred Stanley guilty. One moment, he almost hated himself for believing him capable of such an action; and then the startling train of circumstantial evidence would arise before him, until there seemed no longer room for the shadow of doubt. Amid all this war of conflicting emotions neither of them suspected Ralph de Lisle, whom they imagined far away.

"Ha, what have we here?" exclaimed Nugent

suddenly, as a portion of a blue scarf caught his eye, lying under a charred and broken stick. He picked it up. Both recognized it as one Edith had worn that fatal night. It was of rich blue silk, embroidered with silver fringe, and now more than half burned. It was spotted with blood, and near the end was a hole, exactly such as would be made by the dagger.

"It is but another proof of his guilt," said the major, in a low, thick voice. "Edith! Edith! But there is no time for mourning! When Justice is satisfied there will be time enough for tears."

His eyes were burning and tearless, his face was deadly pale, but there was a look of fierce determination in his face.

As they reëntered the village, they were met by the bustling little landlord of the inn.

"Ah, good morning, Major Percival! Good morning, Mr. Nugent! Fine day this; been up to the fire, I s'pose; queer thing that, queer thing. S'pose you haven't seen anything of a tall fellow in a black cloak and hat over his face, hey?"

"What of him?" said Nugent with breathless interest.

"Oh, nothing, nothing, only he came here late last night, and ordered a room; then went out and didn't come in till after midnight. Two or three minutes after he was off to the fire, and

since then nobody's seen him. Funny chap! Went off without paying the reckoning, and drank more brandy than I like to think of. Good morning!" And the landlord bustled away.

Major Percival hurried to the nearest magistrate to make a deposition of the case, and obtain a warrant for the arrest of Fred Stanley. Nugent, finding the task of announcing the dreadful news devolved upon him, hastened home, stunned and bewildered like one who walks in a dream.

Gently as he broke the news to them the effect was terrible. Mrs. Percival fell into violent convulsions and was carried to her room. Nell grew deadly white, and such a feeling of sickness came over her that for a moment she was on the verge of fainting. But when she heard Fred accused as the murderer indignation restored her to herself, and she exclaimed vehemently:

"I'll never believe it—never, never! I would as soon credit it, Nugent, if they said you did it yourself. How dreadful, how dreadful, to think we were all here, dancing and enjoying ourselves, and Edith lying cold and dead without one friend near to aid her! Oh, Edith, Edith, Edith, my dearly-beloved sister!"

She covered her face with her hands and wept so hysterically that both Nugent and Gus were

alarmed. The latter endeavored to console her, but she pushed him away saying:

"No, no, let me alone! Oh, Edith, Edith, my murdered sister!"

And all through that day she wandered about the gloomy house, wringing her hands and repeating that dear name, her pale face, disheveled hair and disordered dress giving her the look of one insane. It was a silent and gloomy mansion indeed. The servants, pale with horror, stole about as noiselessly as ghosts through the house, still as the grave, save when a wild shriek from the darkened room of Mrs. Percival would reach their ears. And Nell wandered vacantly about twisting her fingers and repeating, "Edith, Edith!"—seeing but one object: the murdered form of her sister.

Through the village the news had spread like wildfire. Men were gathered in groups at every corner, talking over the tragic occurrence; women forgot their household affairs to speak of the goodness of the murdered girl, and weep over her untimely fate, for Edith was universally beloved. People spoke of it in low whispers, for the whole affair seemed wrapped in mystery. Never had such a thing been heard of before in that quiet little village; and they almost held their breath as they wondered whose turn it would be next.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ARREST.

"And yet he seems not overcome,
Although as yet his voice be dumb."

In the little parlor of the "Bottle and Bowl" sat Fred Stanley. He was stretched at full length on a lounge leisurely smoking a cigar and listening to the merry voice of Mrs. Rosie Wilde, as she alternately scolded the servants, laughed with the neighbors, and talked to the baby. And while he indolently watched the blue smoke wreathing upward Fred was thinking.

He thought of Edith and wondered if he should ever see her dear face again, of her stern father and his invincible antipathy to himself, of his hated rival Ralph de Lisle, of his father, who was on the eve of departure for England, and whom he had never seen since the night he liberated him, of the mysterious hermit, and wondered what new danger was destined to bring them face to face; and lastly of himself, as yet undecided what to do or whither to go.

The quick tramp of a horse's feet dashing down the street arrested his attention. The horseman drew up and alighted at the inn door. Fred fancied his form was familiar; but he stood

undecided, until he heard the newcomer pronounce his name in hurried tones. The next moment the door was thrown violently open, and Gus Elliott, pale, haggard, dusty, and travel-worn, burst into the room.

"Gus, my dear fellow! is it possible?" exclaimed Fred, springing up and grasping his hand. "But," he added, seeing his despairing look, "what in the world has happened?"

Gus fixed his eyes on his face. He could read nothing there but frank astonishment. Would a guilty man act and look thus? His doubts, if he entertained any, vanished in a moment; and wringing the hand his friend extended, he exclaimed:

"Oh, Fred! then you have not heard? How can I tell you the dreadful story?"

"What dreadful story? My dear Gus, sit down and compose yourself. You look as though you were insane."

"Do I? I may well look insane. You, too, will look insane when you have heard my story."

"Then let me hear it."

"Oh, Fred, my business here is *very* painful—painful in the extreme!"

"Then, my dear Gus, let me advise you to get it over as soon as possible. The longer you hesitate the worse it will be," said Fred, resuming his seat on the lounge.

"Have you no idea of what my errand is? I come from Percival Hall."

"Well?" said Fred inquiringly.

Gus paced silently up and down.

"Does it concern Edith?" inquired Fred, for the first time beginning to feel alarmed.

"It does."

"What has happened? Gus, has De Lisle carried her off again?"

"No, no! Worse still!" groaned Gus.

"What mean you?" cried Fred, springing up, white with apprehension. "Is she—is she——"

"Dead!" said Gus solemnly.

There was a long pause. Gus turned to the window to hide his agitation. He did not venture to look at his friend, whose labored breathing sounded unnaturally loud in the silence of the room.

"Where—how—when did she die?" he asked at length, in a voice so altered that Gus started back in terror.

"Fred, my dear friend, prepare yourself for the worst," he said, scarcely daring to tell all.

"The worst has passed. Edith is dead! Nothing you can say now will affect me," he answered, with such unnatural calmness that Fred almost feared the blow had unsettled his reason.

"Fred, she was—murdered!"

Another long pause followed. Fred's face

had grown so sternly rigid that it looked as though turned to marble.

"By whom?" he asked.

"That is unknown," replied Gus, who shrank with cowardly fear from telling him all.

"When was she—when did this happen?" said Fred, whose lips seemed unable to frame the word.

"The night before last. The news has spread like wildfire; and I had hoped that you had heard it ere this, and so spared me the pain of being the first to announce it."

"Where is Ralph de Lisle?" said Fred, in a tone that plainly indicated he had little doubt who was the murderer.

"I know not. Most probably on his way to England, or in the far Southwest. No one suspects him of being the murderer."

"Who then can it be? How could one so sweet, so gentle, have enemies? Was she robbed as well as murdered?"

"Her body was not found," said Gus, who uttered each word as slowly and reluctantly as though it burned his lips. "You recollect, perhaps, the old barn on the bluff?"

"Yes."

"She was decoyed there and slain. The barn was afterward set on fire and her remains were consumed in the flames."

Something like a groan escaped the lips of Fred. Sinking into a seat he shaded his face with his hand, and for several moments sat silent and motionless. Then, without raising his head or looking up, he said huskily:

"Tell me the particulars. I would know all."

Sadly and reluctantly Gus complied. Fred sat with his hand still shading his face, so cold and still that he seemed to be slowly petrifying. Gus related all save who was the suspected murderer, his lips refused to reveal that.

"You see the affair is wrapped in complete mystery," he concluded. "But no doubt the murderer will yet be found. No exertion will be spared to ferret him out. The arm of divine Providence is long enough to reach him even to the uttermost bounds of the earth."

Fred did not speak or move. The suddenness of the shock seemed to have completely stunned him.

"My dear friend," said Gus, going over and laying his hand on Fred's shoulder, "bear up! It is a heavy blow and I can sympathize with you; but never despair! We all knew and loved Edith, we all feel her loss, but still, despair is useless. Bear up Fred and be a man! I have seen you before now face death at the cannon's mouth without wincing, and will you now sink under affliction like a timid girl?"

Fred looked up and disclosed a face so pale and eyes so despairing that Gus felt his words were worse than useless.

He went and took a seat by the window and gazed out. Fred sat silent and motionless. And so an hour passed before either moved or spoke.

The sound of a carriage stopping before the door at length startled Gus. He looked up eagerly and grew a shade paler as he heard a quick, authoritative voice inquire for "Mr. Fred-eric Stanley."

"Step into the parlor, sir, if you please. He's there with another gentleman," said the cheery voice of Rosie Wilde.

The door was pushed open, and, stern and excited, the sheriff of the county, followed by a constable, stood before them.

"Mr. Stanley, I believe," said the sheriff, bowing to Fred, who lifted his head and answered briefly in the affirmative.

"Then, sir, I arrest you in the name of the law," said the sheriff, letting his hand fall on the young man's shoulder.

"Arrest me!" exclaimed Fred, springing to his feet, and fiercely shaking off the officer's hand as though stung by a viper.

"Such is my painful duty, sir."

"In the name of Heaven, sir, upon what

charge?" impetuously exclaimed Fred, now thoroughly aroused into action.

"You are arrested upon charge of having murdered Edith Percival."

Fred reeled as though suddenly struck and was forced to grasp the table for support. For a moment everything seemed swimming around him, then, conscious that the keen eyes of the official were fixed upon him, he recovered his usual stately firmness and answered with cold self-possession:

"I am ready to attend you, sir. Gus, farewell! Do *you* believe this charge?"

"Heaven forbid, Fred!" said Gus, in a choking voice.

"You knew when you came I was suspected, did you not?"

"Yes, but it was so monstrous, so absurd, I could not tell you."

"It would have been better if you had, but it matters not now. The world no doubt believes me guilty, but what care I for the world now? Sir, I am quite ready."

The sheriff bowed, and in his charge Fred quitted the room. Bidding adieu to Mrs. Wilde, whose lamentations were loud and heartfelt, he entered the carriage, which was driven immediately toward the county jail.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRIAL.

"And he for her had also wept,
But for her the eyes that on him gazed,
His sorrow, if he felt it, slept,
Stern and erect his brow was raised;
Wate'er the grief his soul avowed,
He would not shrink before the crowd."

A fortnight had passed away since the arrest of Fred Stanley. The court would sit in another week, and his trial was among the first in the session.

In his cell the prisoner sat alone. His face was pale but firm, sad but composed. His long neglected locks fell darkly over his lofty brow, as he sat watching a sunbeam that stole through the grated window. He heard the key turn in the lock; the next moment the door opened, and Gus entered.

Fred arose and extended his hand, saying with a sad smile:

"This is indeed kind, Gus! All the rest of the world seems to have deserted me but you."

"They believe you guilty, Fred; I do not. I would have visited you before, but circumstances would not permit. When does your trial come on?"

"To-morrow week."

"You have engaged counsel?"

"Yes, Mr. Joice, one of the best lawyers in the State."

"That's well. Oh, there's no fear of your acquittal, Fred. It seems incredible to me how you could ever have been suspected."

"You forget the circumstantial evidence."

"Nothing but circumstantial evidence, nevertheless, my dear friend."

"True, but much slighter has been found sufficient to condemn a man before now."

"But it will not in your case. I feel sure of it. It is impossible, Fred, that you can be convicted!" exclaimed Gus, impetuously rising and pacing the cell.

"Well, never mind that now. What's the news from the outer world? What does public opinion say of me?"

"Public opinion's a—fool!"

"In many cases it is, no doubt; but what does it say of me?"

"It says you're—guilty."

"I thought so," said Fred quietly. "This charitable world is always inclined to look on the worst possible side of things. No doubt there will be an immense crowd at the trial."

"Oh, of course! You never saw such excitement. Your family and the Percivals being so

highly connected, nothing else is talked of. People are looking forward to the trial with an eagerness and anxiety you can have no idea of. They are crazy to get a sight of you, too, and you may expect to endure a pretty prolonged stare from a couple of thousand eyes on that day. This exaggerated anxiety would be ludicrous were it not so annoying," said Gus, biting his lip.

"Where are the Percivals now?" inquired Fred, after a pause.

"The major and Nugent are in town here, Mrs. Percival, whose life is despaired of, is at home, and poor Nell, half insane with grief, is with her."

"Is my father here yet?"

"Yes; I saw him yesterday, looking as though fifty years had lately been added to his age, but as proud and haughty as ever. 'Tis said he will wait until after your trial and then leave for England."

"I suppose he imagines me guilty, like the rest?"

"No doubt; but when your trial is over and your innocence clearly proved, perhaps they will change their tune."

"It matters little," said Fred; "even though I am acquitted public opinion will still believe me guilty, and I will be just as much a murderer in the eyes of the world as though I had been con-

demned. But what do I care for the opinion of the world?" he added, drawing himself proudly up, while some of the old haughtiness flashed in his eye and curled his lip. "I live in a world of my own, as high above theirs as heaven is above the earth. But you, dear Gus—I should be sorry to lose your faith in my integrity. How will you be able to maintain your belief in my innocence, against such an overwhelming mass of testimony as will be brought against me?"

"Though all the world should believe you guilty, Fred, I never will," replied Gus firmly.

"Even though I should be condemned?"

"Even though you should be condemned!"

"Heaven bless you, my dear friend," said Fred, grasping his hand, while tears sprang to his deep, dark eyes.

"And now I must leave you, Fred," said Gus. "I will see you to-morrow again, if possible. Meantime, remember the old motto: 'Hope on, hope ever.'"

"There remains but little for me to hope for," said Fred sadly. "Hitherto, I have always borne an unsullied name; but now the disgrace of this trial for murder will cling to me for life."

"Nonsense, Fred! The world is not so unjust. 'Before morning dawns, night is ever darkest.' There are bright days in store for you yet, believe me."

"You are unusually full of 'wise saws' to-day, Gus," said Fred with something like the old smile flitting over his handsome face. "I shall wait impatiently for your coming to-morrow, for, shut in this black hole, it seems like a glimpse of the outer world to catch sight of you."

Gus knocked at the door to be let out. The jailer opened it and the youth disappeared.

The day of trial came at last. Even at early morn the streets were crowded by the excited mob, anxious to catch a glimpse of the prisoner when he should be led forth. Stores were closed, for men forgot to buy and sell in talking over the dreadful murder, and the assassin's probable fate. Women neglected their ordinary occupation to chat over the demerits of the case, for the prisoner being young, handsome, and highly connected, deeply interested the fair sex. Even children forgot their marbles and tops in the all-absorbing topic, and played at "trials," and talked of judge and juries, instead of kites and penknives. In short, nothing was thought or spoken of but the one exciting subject—the trial of Frederic Stanley on the appalling charge of murder.

The doors were at length thrown open. The crowd rushed in and the courtroom was filled to

suffocation. A deep, low murmur, like the surging of the sea, filled the air as the mighty crowd swayed to and fro. The murmur increased almost into a roar as the prisoner, in the custody of the sheriff, entered. The scowling faces on every side showed how deeply the mob were prejudiced against him, and it was with the utmost difficulty order could be maintained.

Fred entered with the careless grace habitual to him, his fine head erect, his keen, dark eyes fixed calmly on the excited crowd. More than one scowling glance fell before his haughty eye, and the public was forced to think that he looked far more like some captive prince than an assassin. If he were guilty, he certainly betrayed no sign of it.

Taking his place at the bar, Fred glanced again at the crowd in the courtroom. There sat Major Percival, with a brow stern and dark as night, his eyes fixed on the prisoner with a look of such intense hatred and loathing that he seemed longing to tear him limb from limb. Near him sat Nugent, his eyes fixed on the crowd, his brow clouded, but there was a look far more of sorrow than of anger on his face. That he believed him guilty there could be little doubt; and for a moment a feeling of despair weighed on the heart of Fred at the thought: "If Nugent Percival, with his open, generous nature and noble mind,

believed him capable of murder, what could he expect from strangers?"

At the opposite end of the courtroom, with his arms folded across his breast, his cloak thrown over his shoulders, and wrapped in his haughty pride as in a garment, sat Sir William Stanley. His face was cold and stern, his eye clear and unpitying, his mouth firm and rigid. Whether he believed in his son's guilt or not it would be hard to determine. Nothing could be read from his face; all was stern and expressionless there.

Again he glanced over the crowd. Whichever way he turned nothing met his eyes but fierce looks and sullen glances. Those who had been his friends in other days sat with downcast eyes and averted faces; no kindly look was there. Not one among all that immense crowd, if called upon to pronounce his doom, but would have shouted: "Guilty, guilty!"

He turned away with a feeling of despair at his heart, but his outward bearing was bold, undaunted, and almost defying. He glanced at the bench. Even the presiding judge seemed to have made up his mind as to the guilt of the prisoner, judging by the look his face wore.

As for the jury little could be read from their blank faces, but more than one of them he knew to be his personal enemies.

Amid all that assembly there was but *one* who

in his heart believed in the innocence of the prisoner. Gus, faithful to the last, stood by his side, returning every look of hatred directed toward his friend with compound interest, and endeavoring, by his cheerful face and hopeful glances, to encourage him to trust for the best.

Having taken his place, the usual charge was read, arraigning the prisoner with the willful murder of Edith Percival by stabbing her with a knife on the night of the fifth of June. Fred listened with outward calmness to the charge, and when the clerk of the court asked the usual question: "Frederic Stanley, how say you—are you guilty or not guilty of the felony with which you are charged?" his dark eye flashed and his lip curled as he answered with cold haughtiness:

"Not guilty!"

The State's attorney then arose and proceeded with his address. No pen can describe the emotions which his eloquence and pathos produced in minds already made up to believe the prisoner's guilt. To destroy any favorable impression the well-known nobleness and generosity of the prisoner might have made on the minds of the jury, he spoke of the excesses to which blind rage will often excite even the most tranquil, of his known haughtiness and fiery temper, which could never endure opposition.

He dwelt long and eloquently on each trifling

circumstance that could by any possibility heighten his guilt, until Gus grew pale with apprehension.

As he proceeded to state the case, the audience were wrought up to a pitch of the highest excitement.

He stated that the prisoner at the bar had conceived a passion for his unhappy victim, knowing her to be the betrothed of another; how by his artful words he induced her to forget her plighted engagement and turn her affections to himself; that he had audaciously disclosed his feelings to the father, boasting of his ascendancy over her at the same time; that, meeting with what he deserved, an indignant dismissal, he had departed in high anger; that some time after, her former engagement being broken by a circumstance not necessary to mention, the prisoner, on the evening of the murder, again made his appearance in the little village, thinking, no doubt, he was now sure of success; that he was met by the young lady's father, who refused to permit him to see her, that angry words ensued, and the prisoner rode off in high displeasure; but instead of leaving the village, had by means of a little boy decoyed his victim to a lonely house, and there, upon her steadily refusing to fly with him, murdered her.

He referred to the gentle and amiable charac-

ter of the unhappy young lady, her beauty, her goodness, and the deep, trusting affection for himself with which her murderer had inspired her. How unsuspectingly she had been betrayed into meeting the unworthy object of her love, and because her sense of duty was greater than her affection for him, was, as she stood there with him, alone and helpless, basely assassinated.

So touching was the picture he drew, so pathetic were his words, that all the women present sobbed convulsively, and even among the men, many eyes, all unused to the melting mood, grew dim, and flashed still more fiercely through their tears on the prisoner, who, with his face shaded by his hand, strove to hide the agony he endured, when the speaker dwelt on the harrowing fate of his beloved Edith.

The State's attorney concluded by saying he would prove his statements by facts—stern, undeniable facts—by competent and respectable witnesses, whom he would now call in the order of the circumstances they were to prove had occurred.

“Major Percival will take the stand.”

The major advanced, and after the usual oath, testified that the prisoner at the bar had conceived a passion for the deceased, which she returned, that the prisoner had boldly informed the witness of it, and that they had parted in high anger.

That on the evening of the murder the witness had accidentally met the prisoner and accosted him, demanding his business there, knowing he could have come for no good purpose; that the prisoner had audaciously told him he came to see his daughter once more before leaving the country; that he indignantly bade him begone, and that the prisoner in a rage had ridden off, and that he had not seen him since until to-day at the bar.

Being cross-examined, he admitted that at parting the prisoner had made use of no threats, and that his own words had been angry and insulting. The witness was then allowed to retire.

The next witness called was Nugent Percival.

He corroborated the testimony of his father, and further deposed that after learning the particulars of the murder, he had, in company with his father visited the spot; that he had found a dagger stained with blood, which he knew to be the property of the prisoner, as it bore his name, and had been the gift of his father. That he likewise discovered a portion of a silk scarf, which he knew the deceased had worn on the night of the murder.

The dagger and scarf were produced and identified by the witness.

A severe cross-examination followed but nothing more was elicited.

Sir William Stanley was then called. After closely examining the dagger he pronounced it to be the same he had himself given his son.

Fred listened like one thunderstruck to this testimony. That the dagger was his there could be no doubt, and he now recollected having lost it a short time previous to the murder, but had troubled himself little about it, never dreaming it would yet bear so fatally against him in a court of justice.

Gus, who had listened with equal surprise, now stooped down and whispered:

"That proves nothing. The murderer might have accidentally found it or stolen it to lay the blame on you."

The third witness called was Edward Dillon.

Master Eddy came up with a swagger, evidently in the highest spirits. Convinced that nothing would be done to him for his share in the transaction, and elated by the reward promised him if he told the truth boldly, he was in excellent humor, and delighted to find himself shining off before so great a crowd.

"Witness, do you understand the nature of an oath?" asked the State's attorney.

"'Spect I do," said Eddy seriously.

"What is an oath?"

Eddy laid his finger on his nose in deep meditation; but evidently the question was a poser. He glanced appealingly at the judge, but that high functionary was looking at him through his gold-rimmed spectacles with silent but overwhelming dignity. Finding no help from his quarter Eddy scratched his head with a look of intense perplexity.

"Witness, what is an oath?" solemnly repeated his interlocutor.

"Well, if I must, I must, though I plaguy hate to," said Eddy. "When you told the tailor day afore yesterday when he asked you for his bill to 'go to the devil,' that was an oath."

A roar of laughter from the crowd followed this, while the attorney, who was noted for now and then indulging in profanity, turned crimson with rage.

"Silence, sir, and answer to the point," he angrily exclaimed. "Do you know where you'll go to when you die if you take a false oath?"

"Well, I s'pose I'd go where they say all the bad folks and the lawyers go."

And Eddy gave his head a peculiar jerk to designate the place below.

Another snicker from the crowd followed this; and convinced by this time that Eddy really did know the nature of an oath, the court concluded

that that promising young gentleman should be sworn.

"Witness, look at the prisoner at the bar."

Eddy turned and favored Fred with a patronizing nod and grin.

"Now, witness, you have seen the prisoner. Do you know him?"

"Well, I can't say that I am particularly acquainted with him," answered Eddy gravely.

"Have you ever seen him before?"

"Well, now, I really couldn't say for certain, you know. Think I have, though."

"Does he look like any one you have ever seen?"

"If he had a long cloak on, and a hat pulled over his face, I would be s'prised if he looked uncommon like the chap as got me to go for Miss Edith."

"Witness, on your oath, can you testify that this is not the same person who paid you on the night of the murder to bring the young lady to the lone house on the bluff?"

"'Twas after night, and his hat was away down over his face, and the rest of him was kivered up in a big cloak, and not having the eyes of a cat, I couldn't 'stinguish him precisely. He was 'bout the size of that 'ere prisoner, though, and—yes, he had long, black hair like him, too—I saw that."

“Well, now tell the jury all that passed between you and the murderer that night.”

Interlarding the narrative with many explanations of his own, not particularly lucid, and many profound observations on what he thought and said to “hissself,” which were generally cut short by the unceremonious attorney, Eddy proceeded with his tale, which is too well known to the reader to need repetition here.

When he came to the meeting, where Edith addressed her murderer as “Fred,” the prisoner lifted his head and gazed upon the boy with a look of utter amazement. That he was telling the truth there could be no doubt, for there was an unmistakable look of honesty and candor on his face.

Eddy was severely cross-examined by the counsel for the defense, but all his answers were plain and straightforward, and to the point. At length, thoroughly exasperated by this raking fire of cross-questions, he indignantly and stoutly refused to answer a single question more. And amid the laughter of the audience Master Eddy was permitted to sit down.

The girl Betty was then called, who corroborated the evidence of Eddy, as far as coming for the deceased was concerned, and further identified the scarf as one the deceased had worn on leaving home.

The landlord of the inn was the next witness summoned, who deposed that a stranger answering to the description given of the murderer, had engaged a room in his house for the night; that half an hour previous to the murder, he had hastily left the house and turned in the direction of the old house on the bluff; that he had returned in great haste, and evidently much excited, and drank a great deal of brandy; that, upon the alarm of fire being given, he had hastened out with the rest, and that his almost frantic actions had excited the wonder of several; that after the fire, he—the witness—had hastened home, that he observed the assassin plunge into the woods, and returned to his house no more. Being cross-examined, he could not swear positively that the prisoner at the bar and the murderer were one and the same person, as he had not, during the night, procured a good view of his face, but he thought they were the same, their height was alike, the color of their hair, etc.

Several other witnesses were examined, but nothing more of importance was elicited, and the court was shortly after adjourned until the following day.

On the second day of the great trial the crowd was even greater than before, all eager to hear the fate of the prisoner. Every eye was turned upon him as he entered. Pale, but firm, his eagle

eye met the gaze of that crowd, all anxious for his condemnation, without flinching, and taking his seat he lifted his princely head, and fixed his dark eyes on the bench as calmly as though the men before him held not his life in their hands.

When the last witness for the prosecution had been examined the defense was taken up, and conducted with great skill and eloquence by the counsel for the prisoner. He spoke at length upon the high character his client had always maintained, and enlarged on every point that could possibly be in his favor. It was evident, however, his words made but little impression on the minds of the jury.

The counsel for the prosecution then arose, and summed up the testimony against the prisoner in one crushing mass of evidence. When the judge stood up to charge the jury, the silence of that mighty crowd was so deep that it might almost be felt. It was quite evident that in his mind there existed no doubt of the prisoner's guilt, and though he urged the jury to deliberate calmly upon the evidence, every one present felt that the prisoner's doom was sealed.

The jury withdrew to deliberate, and the silence of that mighty crowd was so profound and ominous that it was painful to witness. Every eye was directed toward the prisoner, who, with his stately head erect, his proud, handsome face

as cold and firm as marble, betrayed no sign of his feelings within. Gus, noble, true-hearted Gus, still stood faithful by his side, his only remaining friend, and looking fierce defiance at every scowling glance directed toward Fred.

And what were the feelings of those who in other days had stood by him during those awful moments of suspense? Sir William Stanley, as stern and grim as death itself, sat with his lips compressed, his stony eyes fixed on the floor, his iron face expressing no emotion whatever. Major Percival sat, deadly pale, but with the old look of mingled hatred and triumph on his face. Nugent's head was bowed on his hand, his face hidden by his falling hair.

Presently the jury reëntered. The foreman arose and announced that their verdict was ready.

The judge arose.

"Gentlemen of the jury, how say you, is the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty!" cried the clear, excited voice of a female, and forcing her way through the crowd that fell back in mingled fear and amazement, a young girl stood before the bench.

Throwing back the veil that hid her face, the newcomer turned slowly round, and the wonder-struck spectators beheld the pale but beautiful Edith Percival.

CHAPTER XVI.

EDITH'S STORY.

"Then think of this maxim, and cast away sorrow.
The wretched to-day may be happy to-morrow!"

For a moment the profound silence of intense amazement held every tongue speechless, every voice silent; and the dense crowd stood motionless, spell-bound! And then, "Edith! Edith! Edith Percival!" rang out like the roar of the sea.

The excitement and uproar was fearful; the judge sat transfixed; the jury gazed on her with mouth and eyes agape; the crowd reeled and swayed to see one who seemed to have risen from the grave to vindicate the prisoner; the clerk of the court forgot to cry silence, and stood staring in speechless astonishment like the rest.

And Fred—the sudden revulsion of feeling, the unexpected sight of one he imagined in heaven, came so stunningly upon him, that for a moment the sight left his eyes, his senses reeled, and he leaned his head upon the railing, feeling as though he should faint. It was but for an instant, then all his wonderful power of self-control came back and he lifted his head, almost fearing what he had seen and heard was but a de-

lusion, a dream. But, no, there stood Edith alive, lovely and radiant as when he first beheld her, her soft blue eyes beaming upon him with such a look of deep, unutterable love.

With a passionate exclamation Major Percival arose to his feet and would have sprung toward his daughter, but as well might he have endeavored to force his way through a wall of iron, as through that madly excited crowd. Nugent perceived how vain would be the effort, and though almost delirious himself with overwhelming emotion, he strove to keep him back from the crushing throng of human beings.

But above all the noise and uproar that filled the courthouse, there arose a cry, a cry so full of unspeakable horror and despair, that every heart stood still. All eyes were turned in the direction from whence it came, and there before them, like a galvanized corpse, stood Ralph de Lisle. Oh, such a ghastly face, such livid lips flecked with blood and foam, such wild despairing, horror-struck eyes! Every face blanched with a deep unspeakable awe as they gazed.

"Sheriff, I command you to arrest Ralph de Lisle, on charge of attempting the murder of Edith Percival," called a calm, commanding voice, that sounded strangely clear and cool amid all that wild storm of passion and excitement, and waving his arm to where stood the con-

science-stricken man, the Hermit of the Cliffs turned toward the bench.

"Never!" shouted De Lisle fiercely, all his presence of mind returning with the imminence of his danger, as he struggled madly to force his way through the waving sea of beings between him and the door.

But he struggled in vain. The strong hand of the officer grasped his collar in a grip of iron.

"Dog of a sheriff! Release me!" he cried, foaming with rage, and endeavoring to wrench himself from his powerful grasp.

Half a dozen willing hands were raised to aid the officer, when De Lisle, seeing all hope was past, with the rapidity of lightning, drew a pistol and leveled it at Edith. She stood white and motionless, unable to move, while a low cry of horror arose from the spectators. But his murderous object failed, for as quick as thought his arm was struck upward, while the pistol fell to the ground and went off. A shriek of pain followed, and a boy was raised from the floor bleeding and was carried out, the ball having lodged in his ankle.

This did not tend to allay the feelings of the mob, who turned upon De Lisle, and would have torn him to pieces but for the interference of the officers. His arms, after desperate resistance, were pinioned firmly behind his back, and still

struggling like a madman he was borne to a place of safety.

With the utmost difficulty peace was at length restored, and Edith was commanded to tell her story; and then the deepest silence followed where a moment before all had been fierce noise and wild uproar, and all ears were bent and necks strained to catch each word that fell from her lips. But Edith was so weak and faint from excitement that her voice was inarticulate. A chair was brought for her, and a glass of water presented by Gus, who, poor, faithful fellow, scarcely knew whether he ought to laugh or cry, and consequently did neither, and then Edith turned to the bench and began:

"I presume all here present know most of the events of that night. Oh, that dreadful night! I cannot even now think of it without a shudder.

"Thinking I was to visit his sister, I accompanied the boy, Eddy Dillon, from home. Forming some excuse, he persuaded me to go with him to the old house on the bluff. As we ascended the hill, a man wrapped in a cloak, his face hidden by his hat, stepped from the old house and stood before us. I imagined it to be Frederic Stanley, who that evening had been in the village, and thinking he had employed the boy to lead me there for a clandestine interview, I addressed him by his name. He did not reply,

but said something in a whisper to Eddy, who immediately ran away. Still thinking it was Fred I followed him into the old house, and again called him by his name. Still he was silent. I grew alarmed, when he dropped his cloak, raised his hat, and I saw before me my mortal enemy, Ralph de Lisle!"

Edith shuddered, and covered her face with her hands as memory conjured up that almost fatal night.

"I was so shocked, so startled, so terror-stricken, that for a moment I almost fainted. I scarcely know how I rallied, but I was inspired by sudden courage, and stood fearlessly before him. He urged me to fly with him or die. Death was preferable to life with him, and I refused. Blinded, maddened by my refusal, he drew a dagger and plunged it into my side. Dimly, as one remembers a frightful dream, I recollect falling to the ground, then I drew out the knife and all grew dark, and with a dull roaring sound as of many waters in my ears, memory and life were alike for a time lost in oblivion.

"When I again opened my eyes I found myself lying in the little cottage among the cliffs, occupied by the aged hermit. For days I hovered between death and life, and with a care for which I can never be sufficiently grateful, the hermit watched over me night and day. He

scarcely ever left me, even for his necessary repose. Owing to his care I slowly recovered. He said it would be dangerous to remove me home, and I was too weak and powerless to care where I was. As he never went out we heard nothing of what was transpiring in the outer world, until yesterday, yielding to my entreaties, he went to inform my parents that I was still alive. The first person he met related the arrest of Mr. Stanley, and informed him he was to be tried to-day for murdering me. With almost frantic haste he turned home and told me all; and scarcely pausing to make the necessary arrangements we started for this place, and, thank Heaven, we have arrived in time to vindicate the innocence of Frederic Stanley."

Edith paused and glanced with a look of unchangeable affection toward the spot where Fred sat, his face alternately flushing and paling with powerful emotion. There was a moment's dead silence, and then a cheer that made the old court-house ring came from every excited heart. Yes; in that moment a complete revulsion of feeling took place in every breast. Fred's triumph was complete; and, with its usual impulsive inconsiderateness, the mob as heartily rejoiced in his innocence as, a few moments previously, they had done in his guilt.

"But how were you rescued?" said the judge,

partaking of the universal excitement. "This blank in your story——"

"Can be filled by me," interrupted the hermit, stepping forward. "On the night in question, passing accidentally—or rather by a dispensation of Providence which men call chance—near the bluff, I beheld to my surprise a sudden jet of flame shoot up from a pile of rubbish near. Anxious to know the cause I hastened up and entered the old barn. All was deserted and dreary around, and I was about to quit it and give the alarm, when my eyes fell on an object lying at my feet, that almost transfixed me with horror, that froze the very blood in my veins. There, lying cold and lifeless, bathed in blood, lay Edith Percival. In a moment the whole truth burst upon me. She had been murdered there, and the assassin had set fire to the house to conceal the evidence of his crime. Should I leave her to perish in the flames? No; not if I died with her. An almost superhuman strength seemed to inspire me. I raised her lifeless form in my arms as though she had been an infant, and turned in the direction of the cliffs. At any other time the feat would have been impossible; but a strength not my own seemed suddenly to have been granted to me, and ere morning dawned I had reached my little cottage in safety.

I had imagined her dead, but to my surprise

and joy I soon discovered signs of life. Having a little knowledge of surgery, I examined the wound and discovered that, though dangerous it was far from being mortal. I applied such remedies as I knew to be good in such a case; and in the course of a few days she began to recover. I did not wish to tell her friends, knowing they would disturb her with visits, and perhaps insist on having her removed, a proceeding which I knew would be highly dangerous. The world calls me odd and eccentric; perhaps this was one of my eccentricities; besides, I wished to have the pleasure of returning to her family one whom they imagined dead. It never occurred to me that any one but the real murderer would be arrested. Judge, therefore, of my surprise, when the first time I left home I learned that Frederic Stanley had been arrested, and was about to be tried for her murder. I lost no time in hastening here—and here I am.”

And then such another shout as rent the air! The crowd seemed to have gone wild. Then the court was adjourned and the prisoner discharged, and Edith went over and laid her hand in his, and looked up in his face with her love-beaming eyes.

The friends of Fred were now pressing around to shake hands and congratulate him on his triumphant vindication. And first among them

came Gus, with "a smile on his lip and a tear in his eye," and who shook Fred's hand until it ached, and who squeezed Edith's little hand until her fingers tingled. Then way was made for Major Percival and his son, the dense crowd opening right and left to allow them to pass. Their meeting was not a very demonstrative one, it could not be in that crowded courtroom, but it was none the less heartfelt and deep for that.

"And Fred, papa?" said Edith gently.

The face of the major grew red with a flush of honest shame and embarrassment as he held out his hand. For a moment Fred hesitated; all his pride rose as he recollected the many indignities he had received from the man before him. Edith saw the struggle in his mind, and laying her hand on his arm and lifting her soft, reproachful eyes to his face, she said:

"Dear Fred!"

He could not resist that witching glance. The next moment his hand grasped that of the major's in the warm clasp of friendship.

"And thus do I atone for the past," said the major, placing the hand of Edith in that of Fred.

In that moment the past, all its wrongs and sorrows and suffering, were forgotten. That instant of bliss more than compensated for the troubled past.

There was one other whose eyes fell on that

scene. Ralph de Lisle, pinioned like a malefactor, and led out between two officers, saw it as he passed. He gnashed his teeth in impotent rage, and his eyes, in their frenzied despair, glared upon them like the burning orbs of a tiger. Such a look of undying hate and fierce anguish Lucifer might have worn when cast from heaven. His livid lips opened to heap curses upon them, but words refused to come. His face grew black and convulsed, his eyes turned in their sockets, he reeled and would have fallen to the ground had not the officers supported him in their arms.

As they raised him a dark stream of blood flowed from his mouth. In his agony of rage and despair he had ruptured a blood vessel.

They bore him off to prison, while the spectators gazed on, horror-stricken. Faint and sick, Edith hid her face in her brother's shoulder with a shudder.

"Let us go," said Nugent, turning away, pale with horror, as he passed his arm around his sister's waist to lead her from the room.

"You will accompany us, of course," said the major in an imperative tone to Fred, who glanced at Edith, and bowed, with a smile. "And you, too," added the major, turning to the hermit, whose eyes were fixed as if fascinaed on Sir William Stanley, as, borne along by the swaying rush, he was approaching them.

"No," said the hermit gravely; "my task is ended and I must return home."

"Oh, pray come with us!" said Edith eagerly; "you will be much happier, I am sure, than living all alone among those dreary cliffs."

But the hermit only shook his head and steadily refused.

Finding entreaties vain they turned to go out, when, unable to extricate himself from the crowd, Sir William Stanley stood directly beside them. All paused in momentary expectation. Fred's cheek flushed and his heart throbbed as he caught his father's eye. He would have held out his hand, but the baronet's stern look forbade it. Lifting his hat to Edith he bowed coldly to the rest and passed on, with the same look of iron inflexibility his hard face always wore. Suddenly his eye fell on the hermit, who was half hidden behind the tall figure of Fred. He gave a sudden start as though he had received a galvanic shock, his face grew deadly white and then deepest crimson, as he plunged into the crowd and disappeared.

A carriage was in waiting to convey them to Percival Hall. The hermit, in spite of their united entreaties, persisted in refusing to accompany them, and at the door bade them farewell. The major, Edith, Nugent, Fred, and Gus therefore entered, and were soon on their way home.

They traveled slowly, for Edith was still weak; and the next day about noon arrived at the Hall. Who can describe the meeting that there ensued? Joy seldom kills, and though the shock nearly extinguished the slight spark of life that yet lingered in the breast of Mrs. Percival, she slowly began to recover. As for Nell, her first impulse was to embrace every one present, which she accordingly did, to the great disgust of Gus, who would have been infinitely better pleased to have received them all himself. That young lady remained quite serious for a day or two; but after that she became the same incorrigible she had been before. And Gus, driven to desperation, declared that, of all the trials his friend had been afflicted with, he had never to endure so severe a trial as Nell Percival.

CHAPTER XVII.

"THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH."

"Burning heart and beating brow

Ye are very quiet now."—E. B. BROWNING.

It was night, dark, chill, and dismal. The rain pattered like spectral figures against the grated windows, the wind moaned and wailed drearily without.

In his cold cell sat the once gay and handsome Ralph de Lisle. Dark and wild was the storm without, and darker and wilder was the heart within his bosom. His face was blanched to the hue of death, and looked still whiter, contrasted with his heavy black locks. He was half reclining on his wretched bed, lying so still, so motionless, that one might have thought him dead, but for the fierce living light blazing in his wild, black eyes.

It was wonderful how he could lie there so immovable with such a fire in his heart, the burning fire of remorse. All his life seemed passing in review before him, and he shuddered to find himself so young in years, yet so old in crime. His part in the drama of life was over, and the world would go round as though he never had existed. He felt like a man who has staked his

all on the gaming table, and lost. The world had been to him a chessboard, and men and women had moved as he willed; but an unseen, though powerful, hand had been playing against him; another had won, and Ralph de Lisle was checkmated in the great game of life.

Like some dark panorama all the events of his life were still passing before him. He thought of the past, of his boyhood, with all its bright promises, high hopes, and glorious delusions. How easy all those noble projects seemed of realization then! But like the mirage of the desert, one by one they had faded away at his approach. His radiant daydreams had all set in a sea of blood and crime, and he had gone down, down, in his rapid career of crime, not daring to look back at the height from which he had fallen. And then came his visions of that bright land of light and roses, where Edith reigned queen; and once more he seemed wandering with her through the dim mystic aisles of the grand old wood, and watching with his old feeling of adoration the golden sunlight falling on her flowing hair. His prison walls stretched away, and he saw himself standing in the lofty rooms of Percival Hall, with Edith blushing and smiling beside him, his betrothed bride. He saw her so vividly before him with her sunny smile, and her blue love-beaming eyes sinking beneath his, that

the almost forgotten love of other days came back, and with the irrepressible cry, "Oh, Edith, my hope! My dream! My life!" he stretched out his arms, almost expecting to enfold the radiant vision before him. It faded away in thin air, and he awoke with a start from the trance into which he was falling.

The past was gone; he could think of it no longer. And the present! Could this be he, Ralph de Lisle, the high born, the haughty, this convicted felon? Had all his daring projects, all his bold schemes, from which less reckless minds would have shrunk, all his fearless deeds, come to this at last? He had trampled the solemn commands of God and the slavish laws of men alike under his feet; he had committed crimes that no other would have dared to contemplate, until he had begun to fancy himself above punishment. He had gone on so long in his reckless career of crime with impunity that he had forgotten a day of reckoning must come; and now he realized it at length. He could have made his escape after his diabolical crime had been perpetrated, but some power within chained him to the spot. He felt sure Fred Stanley would be convicted and that his triumph would be complete. After the execution of his rival, his intention was to return to England, and there lose the recollection of the past. But all his pro-

jects had fallen to the ground with a crash; she whom he imagined dead was clasped in the arms of his hated foe, and her stern father smiled on their union; a life of happiness was before them—and he was *here*.

What had the future in store for him? His trial was soon to come; and he saw the eyes of the crowd fixed upon him in hatred and derision. They could now point to him in scorn as the foiled assassin. If the law found him guilty and he was condemned! He shuddered as the gallows and all the fearful paraphernalia of a felon's death rose before him. The maddened crowd, glaring at him with their savage eyes, and ready to tear him limb from limb as they had attempted to do in the courthouse. And his rival, his mortal enemy, would be there to exult over his ignominious death?

But his life might be saved! True, he was as much a murderer as though his victim had perished in the burning house, but the law might not find him so. And if he was spared, what then? A long lifetime of drudgery among felons' the lowest of the low, until death would place him in a convict's despised grave!

Those hands, small and white as a woman's, must grow hard and coarse with unceasing toil; and he, a De Lisle, born to wealth and honor, must herd with thieves and murderers for the

remainder of his life. The picture grew too horrible to be longer endured. He sprang from his bed, with the perspiration standing in great beaded drops on his brow, his hands clenched until the nails sank into the quivering flesh, his eyes bloodshot and glaring, an expression of horror unutterable on his ghastly face! Oh, in that moment, how fearful was the maddening storm of passion in his guilty heart! A lifetime of agony seemed concentrating into each second as it passed; the blood seemed to pour like molten lead through every vein; a wheel of fire seemed crashing through his brain; his very eyes seemed like red-hot balls of fire.

He strode up and down like a maniac, and springing to the window shook the iron bars with the fierce strength of madness. His hands were cut and bleeding but he heeded it not, as he struggled like a caged tiger to wrench them away. All in vain! The strong grating resisted his efforts, and he fell heavily with his face on the stone floor. His head struck on something sharp, and the blood rained down from a gash in his forehead. He pressed his hand to the wound, and gazed on the flowing blood with a smile that might have chilled the stoutest heart.

The storm passed away with the morning's dawn. The bright summer sunshine was streaming gloriously through the window when the

jailer entered.* And there, right in the glow of the blessed sunlight, lay Ralph de Lisle—dead.

Of all the sights which the sun rose upon, it looked on none more fearful than that. Without the prison walls the stream of busy life flowed merrily on; the bride stood at the altar, the man of business hurried by, and people talked and laughed as though despair was a word unknown; and within, stark and cold in the glare of the sunlight, lay the rigid form of the dead man, his face upturned to the sky, and staring wide open were the glassy eyes that never would look on aught in this world again!

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

“And thus through all my life it stalked,
That deadly, deadly sin!
Though e’er so fair the outside mirth,
The specter sat within.”

“Go, Elva, go! I must see him before I die!”

“Oh, father! Listen to the storm! How can I go out to-night?”

“Girl! I tell you I must see him—I *must*! Do you hear? Even though fire were falling from heaven, you should have to go forth and bring him to me!”

“But, father, I know not where he is! I could brave the storm; but you may die here before I return.”

“I cannot die—I will not die before you return!” almost screamed Paul Snowe, tossing in wild delirium on his pillow. “Go, and find Sir William Stanley, I tell you, and bring him here to me. I cannot die until I have seen him.”

It was that same tempestuous night on which Ralph de Lisle had breathed his last; and now his accomplice in crime, Paul Snowe, lay wounded unto death. Strange that, on the same night, both should be doomed to die.

He lay in the little room of the inn near Per-

cival Hall. It was the same house in which De Lisle had planned the murder of Edith a few weeks before. Perhaps the recollection of that night added to his delirium, as he tossed on his bed in feverish agony.

A week before, as he loitered round the village, bound by some unaccountable fascination to the place of the supposed murder, he had been stabbed in a drunken brawl. Finding his days were numbered he had caused them to send for his daughter Elva, who had arrived a few hours before.

Troubled and anxious, Elva threw her cloak over her shoulders, and tying on her hood hurried out into the driving rain. As she passed out she encountered the burly landlord, who gazed at her as though he had seen a ghost.

"Jerusalem!" he ejaculated, in amazement, "you ain't surely going out anywhere in the storm, Miss Snowe?"

"Can you tell me where Sir William Stanley is to be found?" inquired Elva hurriedly.

"Well, no, I rayly can't; but his son lives up to Percival Hall. Likely he can tell you."

"Percival Hall!" said Elva, with a start. "Does it belong to Major Percival?"

"Yes'm."

"Has he a daughter, Edith?" inquired Elva, with increasing agitation.

"Yes'm," again responded mine host, looking rather surprised at the emotion she manifested.

"Edith! Dear Miss Edith!" exclaimed the impulsive Elva in a sort of rapture, as she darted out into the blinding storm.

"Well, I never!" said the jolly landlord opening his eyes in amazement until they resembled two midnight moons.

In a moment she was back again and by his side.

"Can you tell me which way I must go to reach Percival Hall?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes'm. Keep on straight for a spell, then turn to the right, and take the forest road. Mind and don't go the other way, or you'll break your neck over the cliffs. You'd better let me send Jenny along with you to show you the way, 'cause—oh, she's gone! She's a queer one, and no mistake," said the worthy landlord, hastening to raise up the spirits of his guests by pouring his own spirits down.

Meantime Elva pursued her lonely way through the driving rain and blinding storm toward Percival Hall, almost flying along in her haste to reach it. I scarcely know whether it is proper to tell a young lady's thoughts or not; but certain it is that, though Edith occupied a prominent place in her mind, Edith's brother occupied a place still more prominent.

But Elva, bewildered by the storm, her own thoughts, her haste, and the strangeness of the place, forgot the landlord's directions, and took the road leading to the cliffs. On she went, stumbling and slipping over rocks and crags, at the imminent danger of breaking her neck. Suddenly the flash of a light caught her eye, and walking in that direction she soon found herself before the home of the Hermit of the Cliffs. She rapped loudly; and a moment after the door opened and the hermit stood before her, holding a lamp in his hand, the full light of which fell on his imposing figure.

With a half-suppressed scream of mingled terror and surprise at this singular apparition, Elva turned to fly, when she was arrested by the mild, kind voice of the hermit:

"Fear not my daughter; the Hermit of the Cliffs is the friend of all mankind."

Elva paused, and stood hesitating.

"Come in out of the storm, my child. It is a wild night for a young girl like you to be abroad."

Reassured by his friendly words, and wishing to know more of this strange-looking personage, Elva, who was naturally courageous, entered the cottage.

She glanced curiously around, but there was nothing very singular about it. It was fitted up

as any other common room might have been, and was singularly neat and clean.

"Now, my child, what can I do for you?" said the hermit, in his pleasant tones.

"I started for Percival Hall," answered Elva, "and being a stranger here I lost my way; and, guided by the light of your lamp, I wandered here and sought admittance."

"You had better stay here until morning," said the hermit; "the night is too stormy for you to venture abroad."

"Oh, no! I cannot. My father is dying, and I cannot rest until he sees Sir William Stanley. I must hasten to Percival Hall immediately, if you will be kind enough to show me the way."

"Sir William Stanley, did I understand you to say?" said the hermit, with a sudden start.

"Yes. Perhaps you can tell me where to find him?"

"Who is your father, child?" asked the hermit, without heeding her question.

"His name is Paul Snowe," replied Elva.

"What!" exclaimed the hermit, almost bounding from the floor.

"His name is Paul Snowe," repeated Elva, drawing back in surprise and alarm.

"Is it possible?" said the hermit, deeply excited. "And are you Paul Snowe's daughter?"

"Yes, sir," said the astonished Elva.

"What is your name?"

"Elvena Snowe."

"Elvena! Elvena!" repeated the hermit. "Can there be two Elvena Snowes in the world?"

"Sir, I must go," said Elva in alarm, beginning to think him insane.

"Wait one moment and I will go with you," said the hermit, cloaking himself with wonderful celerity. "Can it be that I will see Paul Snowe yet once again before I die?"

They passed out and the hermit turned in the direction of the inn, holding Elva firmly by the hand.

"But I must go to Percival Hall," said Elva, drawing back.

"Why?"

"To see Sir William Stanley."

"He is not there, child!"

"His son is, then, and he can tell me where to find him. I must go," said Elva wildly.

"His son knows no more of his whereabouts than you do, Elvena. Believe me: it is impossible for you to find him to-night. If Paul Snowe wishes anything, I will do as well as Paul Stanley. Do not hesitate," he added, as Elva still hung back; "I repeat, it is utterly impossible for you to find him to-night. Come."

Elva felt convinced that he spoke the truth, and seeing no alternative, she allowed him to

draw her on, inwardly dreading to meet her father without the man for whom she had been sent.

On reaching the inn the hermit demanded to be at once shown to the chamber of the sick man. As they entered, Paul Snowe half raised himself on his elbow, and glared at them with his inflamed eyes.

"Elva, is it you?" he cried. "Have you brought Sir William Stanley? Ha, who are you?"

"Your best friend, Paul Snowe," said the hermit, advancing to his bedside.

"I should know that voice. Who are you?"

"Men call me the 'Hermit of the Cliffs,' but you knew me by another name once," was the answer.

"And Sir William Stanley, where is he, Elva? Elva, did you not bring him?" exclaimed the wounded man in an agony of alarm.

"My friend, you cannot see him. Sir William Stanley is many a mile from here. You will never meet him in this world again, for your hours are numbered. Anything you wish to tell him confide in me, and believe me, he shall hear it."

"Can I—dare I tell you? You will not have me arrested?" said the invalid wildly.

"No, my friend; you are beyond the reach of human laws. Speak, and fear not."

"Men say you are good and generous," said Paul, tossing restlessly; "therefore, since it cannot be helped, I will tell you. Elva, leave the room. Listen; what I have to say concerns her."

"Your daughter, Elva?"

"She is no daughter of mine; neither is her name Elva. I stole her when a child. Her name is Leila Stanley!"

He fixed his eyes on the hermit's face to see what effect this announcement would have; but beyond one sudden, convulsive start, he betrayed no emotion.

"Go on," he said after a pause.

"To tell why I stole her it will be necessary to go back in my history. I once had a sister—her name was Elvena—whom I loved as I never loved any other human being in this world. She grew up a beautiful girl, the pride and belle of our village, but in an evil hour she met Sir William Stanley. He was young and handsome in those days, and she soon learned to love him. He pretended to return her affection, and, under an assumed name, he wooed and won her. She became his wife, little dreaming she had wedded a baronet. Well, I must hurry on for I feel that

I have but a few moments to live. He used to go to England under pretense of business, and during one of the occasions he married again, some high-born lady. He had grown tired of his first wife, for he was always a heartless villain; but he wanted his son—they had one child—he came and forcibly tore him away and departed for England. I don't know what story he told Lady Stanley about the child; probably that he had been married and that his wife was dead, or some other convenient lie. I was absent at the time, but when I returned I learned what had happened, that my sister had gone crazy and wandered off, and as we afterward learned, died in a distant village. I swore a fearful oath of vengeance, and that oath has been kept. Years passed on before I could go to England and seek out my sister's murderer. I found him out at last, and learned that he had another child, a daughter, whom both he and Lady Stanley almost idolized. He had stolen Elvena's child from her, and so caused her death. He should suffer as she had done; he, too, should know what it was to lose a child; and one day when she was out playing I carried her off.

“My first intention had been to kill little Leila, but I could not do it. As you may imagine there was a mighty uproar made about Sir William Stanley's child being kidnaped; the whole coun-

try was aroused, but I eluded them all. I had a friend, the mate of a small trading vessel, and his wife consented to take care of the little lady. I gave her my dead sister's name, and as Leila grew up she forgot she ever had any other parent but me. I brought her here, and after a time fell in with Ralph de Lisle, and joined his reckless band of licensed cutthroats.

"But during all those years, undying remorse for what I had done haunted me day and night. Lady Stanley had died shortly after her child's loss; and when I heard of it I felt as though I were a murderer. Do what I would, reason as I pleased, my accusing conscience slept not. I was not one to inspire affection, but I think Elva really likes me. I grew fond of the child myself, but I never could endure her caresses; for at such times the recollection of what I had done would rush upon me with double force; and I would think how she would shrink from me in horror, did she know to what I had reduced her—the heiress of a baronet.

"In after years I met Sir William Stanley's son. Loving my sister as I did, it may seem strange to you I did not love her child also; but I hated him for his father's sake. He was once imprisoned by De Lisle, and liberated by Elva, who little dreamed she was freeing her own brother.

"As I told you my undying remorse gave me no rest, and I resolved at last to tell Sir William Stanley what I had done, and then, if possible, fly the country. But the hand of Providence overtook me, and my tale of crime has been reserved for a deathbed confession.

"The dress Elva wore the day I stole her is in yonder chest," continued the dying man, pointing faintly in the direction; "also a small locket containing her mother's portrait. If anything further is needed to establish her identity, there is a peculiar mark on her arm that cannot be mistaken, and will set at rest all doubts. And now, thank Heaven, my story is ended, and justice has been done at last. It is said that you have great power over Sir William Stanley; therefore, you will have no trouble in inducing him to believe my dying words."

"Thus it is that Heaven ever confounds the wicked, and brings hidden things of darkness to light. Thus it is that justice shall be rendered unto all men at last," said the hermit, clasping his hands solemnly.

"That voice, that voice!" said Paul Snowe, raising himself wildly on his pillow. "Has the grave given up its dead? Are you a man or a being from the world of spirits? Are you——"

Ere the hermit could speak, the fearful death-

rattle resounded through the room. He clutched the air convulsively with his hands, his features worked convulsively, his eyes grew fixed and glassy, and falling heavily back on his pillow—all was over!

CHAPTER XIX.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

Half an hour passed away in the chamber of death ere the hermit moved. He sat gazing, still and silent, on the rigid form before him, wondering, perhaps, how such fierce passions could have existed in that clay-cold form.

Then he arose, and opening the door beckoned Elva to enter. Awed by the expression of his face she stole softly into the room and approached the bed. As her eyes fell on the rigid figure stretched upon it she sprang back with a wild cry of grief.

For with all his faults, and notwithstanding all his cruelty, Elva had really loved Paul Snowe. He had been the only friend and protector she had ever known, and with a passionate exclamation, "Oh, father—father!" she fell on her knees by the bedside, and hid her face in her hands.

"My child, grieve not," said the hermit, laying his hand on her head. "Paul Snowe was no father of thine!"

She arose and stood before him, with parted lips and wonder-dilated eyes.

"Not my father?" she said. "Who then, is?"

"Sir William Stanley."

She did not speak, but still stood regarding him with such a wild, startled look of incredulity and amazement, that he hastened to explain.

“Sir William Stanley had wronged him; and to revenge himself he stole his only daughter. Your name is not Elva Snowe, but Leila Stanley.”

“And this was why he implored me so wildly to bring him Sir William Stanley,” said Elva, in a low, breathless tone, almost bewildered by this sudden announcement.

“It was; he could not die in peace until he had confessed what he had done. And now that you know how deeply he has wronged you, can you forgive him?”

Elva was gazing sadly and intently upon the death-cold form before her. At the hermit's question she looked up, and said earnestly:

“Forgive him? Oh, yes, as I hope to be forgiven. But this seems so strange—so improbable—so like an Eastern romance. Can it be that I really have a father living?”

“And a brother likewise. You have seen Fred Stanley?”

“Yes—yes; I have seen him. He is tall, and dark, and handsome as a prince. And he is my brother! Something drew me toward him from the first; but I never, never could have imagined

anything so wild as this! He is somewhere near here, is he not?"

"Yes, at Percival Hall."

"Shall I see him to-night?"

"No; it were better not. The last remains of Paul Snowe must be consigned to the grave first. For a day or two you will remain with me and then all shall be revealed."

"What God has joined together, let no man put asunder."

The great drawing-room of Percival Hall was ablaze with light. From basement to attic the house was crowded with guests, assembled from far and near, to witness the nuptials of Major Percival's daughters.

Fred and Gus, looking excessively happy, and very unnecessarily handsome, stood before the venerable clergyman, who, in full canonicals and imposing dignity, pronounced the words that made them the happiest of men. Edith and Nell, radiant with smiles and white satin, blushes and orange flowers, stood by their side, promising dutifully to "love, honor, and obey;" although, if the truth must be told, Nell hesitated a little before she could promise the latter.

Suddenly the door was flung open, and in a pompous tone the aristocratic butler announced:

"Sir William Stanley."

Had a bomb exploded in their midst greater consternation could not have appeared on every and agitated, stood before them.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Sir William," said Major Percival, advancing with extended hand.

"My daughter—my daughter! is she here?" demanded the baronet wildly.

"Your daughter?" said Major Percival, in surprise. "If you mean Edith——"

"No, no, no, no! I mean my own child—my long-lost daughter Leila."

"Can he be deranged?" said the major, turning to Fred with a look of alarm.

"I am not mad—read that!" said Sir William, handing the major a note.

"Go to Percival Hall," it said. "This night you shall hear of your lost daughter Leila."

"It is from the mysterious Hermit of the Cliffs," said the major in astonishment. "What can he mean?"

"What he says," said a calm, clear voice that made them all start, as they turned and beheld the hermit.

"My daughter—my Leila—what of her?" exclaimed Sir William, striding forward.

"Behold her!" said the hermit, stepping back, and every eye turned to the slight girlish figure behind him.

"Elva Snowe!" exclaimed half a dozen voices simultaneously, while the baronet started back suddenly at the name.

"Not Elva Snowe, but Leila Stanley," said the hermit, drawing her forward. "On his death-bed, Paul Snowe confessed he had stolen her and resigned her to me. This trinket was on her person when stolen. Probably you recollect it, Sir William."

"Yes—yes; it was I who placed it on her neck; but if Leila, she bears on her arm a singular mark——"

"Look," said the hermit, pushing up her sleeve and exposing a little crimson heart; "are you convinced now?"

"My child—my child!" exclaimed Sir William, clasping in his arms the shrinking Elva. "Thank Heaven, I have found you at last!"

Amazement held every one silent. But the hermit advanced and said:

"You have found one child and the other——"

"Shall be mine likewise," interrupted the baronet, approaching Fred, "if he can forgive the past."

"Willingly, joyfully, my dear father!" said Fred, grasping his hand while tears sprang to his dark eyes. "And Elva—Leila rather—may I claim a brother's privilege?" he added, pressing his lips to her blushing brow.

"And now for a still more surprising discovery," said Sir William, turning with much agitation toward the hermit. "On this joyful occasion it will not do to have one cloud marring our festivity. If you can forgive me for the great wrong I have done you, we may see many happy days together yet."

For a moment the hermit hid his face in his hands, while his whole frame quivered with powerful emotion. Then raising his head, to the amazement of all present, he removed his flowing white hair and his long beard. His robe fell from his shoulders, and, lo! a pale, stately, dark-haired *woman* stood before them.

Wonder chained every tongue. Sir William Stanley sprang forward and clasped her in his arms, exclaiming passionately:

"My wife—my wife—my own Elva!"

"Good Heaven! Sir William Stanley, what means all this?" exclaimed Major Percival, finding his tongue at last.

"It means," said Sir William, raising his head proudly, "that this lady is my first, my only wife, Elvena Snowe. Deeply have I wronged her, but I shall strive to atone for it by a public confession to-night. When I forcibly took her son from her, yonder youth, she was for a time deranged, and wandered away from the village of her birth. After a time a report went forth that

she was dead. She heard it when sanity partially returned, and resolved never to return to the spot where she had suffered so much. She found a cottage deserted among the wild cliffs, and resolved to make her home there. Afraid that some one would recognize and bring her back, with the cunning of partial derangement, she disguised herself as you have seen, and for years lived on alone, until she learned to love the dreary spot. When the war commenced I came here, and was followed by my son. She heard of it, and, unknown herself, she determined to watch over her son. I, as you all know, had condemned him to die. At the eleventh hour she came, and by disclosing who she was, saved his life. I believed her, for the time, to be a being from the world of spirits, and the shock and surprise was so great that I spared my son. Afterward we met and she told me all; but pride would not allow me to confess to the world my guilt. But now since Leila has been so miraculously restored, I can trample pride and the opinion of the world under foot, and proclaim the once Hermit of the Cliffs my wife, in the face of heaven and earth!"

A month later, Sir William and Lady Stanley were bounding over the blue waves to "Merrie England."

They went not alone; for Leila, now Mrs. Nugent Percival, and her husband, accompanied them.

Fred and Edith, and Gus and Nell, dwelt long and happily in the land they loved best.

And now, reader, farewell. We have journeyed together long; but nothing can last forever. All things must have a close, and the characters who have passed before you must disappear from your view at last. I, too, must go from your sight, for the daylight is dying out of the sky, and my task is ended. I trust, however, we may, ere long, meet again.

THE END.

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